

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Bill Ashe

Date of Interview: Part 1-June 9, 2011

Part 2-October 7, 2011

Location of Interview: Part 1-Home of William Ashe

Part 2-Great Meadows National Wildlife

Interviewer: Libby Herland

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 37 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Region 4, Atlanta Office as Forester Appraiser; Washington D.C. as Chief Appraiser; Region 2 as Head of the Realty Office; Region 5 as Deputy Regional Director; Head of the Coastal Program. Post Fish and Wildlife Service he worked for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, The National Refuge Association

Most Important Projects: Did various work to secure land and/or establish following refuges: Ding Darling, Key Deer, Okefenokee, Yazoo, Sevilleta, Piedmont, Currituck, Great Dismal Swamp, Oxbow Refuge, Canaan Valley, Mason Neck

Colleagues and Mentors: Bob Lines, Bill Townes, Larry Givens, Rudy Rudolph, Walt Steiglitz, Jim Silver, Dr. Gabrielson, Lynn Greenwalt, Dick Griffith, Paul Nickerson, Don Young, Don Perkuchin, Howard Larson, Tommy Wood, Jack Watson, Harold Benson, Bob Fields, Karen Hollingsworth.

Most Important Issues: Getting women promoted; politics

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Ashe was born in New Haven, Connecticut, went into the Army, and upon his return home went to the University of Connecticut under the G.I. Bill. He graduated from college, married his wife Betty, and started working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service all in 1953. He is responsible for acquiring lands and establishing many refuges that we enjoy today such as Piedmont, Sevilleta, Great Dismal Swamp, and many more. He also worked on helping women get promoted within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, believes that the best person for the job should get the job regardless of gender. He shares several stories about events that happened and people he knew throughout this career with the Fish and Wildlife Service and continued to do great things for conservation after his retirement with other organizations.

Part 1

LIBBY: Hi, this is Libby Herland. I am the Project Leader at the Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex. And I am serving on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Heritage Committee while the Region 5 representative Jonathan Schafler is doing a tour of duty in Iraq as part of the Coast Guard Reserves. Today is June 9, 2011. I'm at the home of William Ashe, Bill Ashe, who retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service as our Deputy Regional Director in the Northeast Region. Bill had a long and illustrious and very productive career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and we're really pleased to have him be part of our oral history project for the Fish and Service. So Bill, I'm going to ask you some questions and you are going to answer and we will go as long as you feel up to it. The first thing that we'd like to do, is we like to get a little background about you. So can you tell us where you were born, when you were born, give us some information on your family, on growing up, and maybe how you started developing a conservation ethic.

BILL: Well, I was born in New Haven, Connecticut, and grew up basically in Ansonia, Connecticut, which is about fifteen miles north of New Haven.

LIBBY: What year were you born?

BILL: It was May 28, 1929, which puts me in my 83rd year now. So I may hesitate because my neurons are not functioning as rapidly as they once did, but I think I can remember most of the things. I graduated from school, high school, in Ansonia and then I went in the

Army for a couple of years, which most young people did back in those days; this was in the era of World War II, actually was right after World War II. Came back, it was in the service that I kind of thought about what am I going to do with the rest of my life. I was kind of a rascal in high school, and was undistinguished except in athletics, but I decided I would like to take forestry. And I applied and entered the University of Connecticut in their forestry school on the GI Bill, as many of us did back then. And that probably was what got me interested and really interested in conservation and wildlife. I graduated as a forester, but I also had a minor in wildlife management.

LIBBY: Was there something from when you were a child, did you spend a lot of time outdoors, did your family take you?

BILL: Oh, we did; my family was outdoor-orientated, but I was the first college graduate in my family. And we survived during the Depression; I was a Depression child as was my wife, on fish and game, not always gotten legally but that was not unusual back then; you did what you needed to do to survive.

LIBBY: So when you're in college, when you're thinking about going to college, why did you pick forestry of all the things that you could have studied?

BILL: You know, I don't know, I was an outdoor person, and that was my interest and I thought that that would be something that I would enjoy doing for the rest of my life. And oddly enough, I

picked, in my judgement, the right occupation. After graduation...

LIBBY: And what year did you graduate, and this was the University of Connecticut?

BILL: Yeah, 1953. After graduation, I secured a job with the Fish and Wildlife Service in the Atlanta Regional Office. It was basically in the Federal Aid, to work on Federal Aid projects. And so I had two sources of income during my career, basically. One was a Federal Aid Program and the other was the Duck Stamp Program. And I got, when I graduated, Betty and I got married.

LIBBY: Yeah, could you back up a little bit and tell us about your family, and you're married, and where did you meet Betty?

BILL: Well Betty, I've got photographs there, Betty, she and I were, participated in her brother's wedding and my aunt; her brother married my aunt.

LIBBY: Oh, okay.

BILL: And that was how we met. And she would come up to my hometown during our first informative years, and we would see one another occasionally. When I was in college, and went to college, she came up to live with her brother and my aunt and so there was an attraction and we decided we would get married once I finished college. Once I finished college and I had a job in Atlanta, we packed up my whole car and we headed down to Atlanta, and there we were for twenty years. And much of the work that I did in the first twenty years was in Region 4, at first on Federal

Aid Projects, and then on refuge projects.

LIBBY: Now you said you were there for twenty years, were you in Region 4 for twenty years?

BILL: Right.

LIBBY: But you weren't in Atlanta for twenty years.

BILL: Oh yes.

LIBBY: You were in Atlanta, in the regional office?

BILL: In the regional office.

LIBBY: For twenty years, the first twenty years?

BILL: We did a lot of traveling then.

LIBBY: Okay, alright.

BILL: And I would travel around; I was going to tell you I was looking through my field diaries and I didn't believe my wife when she told me how much travel I did, but I did a lot of travel back then.

LIBBY: Okay, so you joined the Fish and Wildlife Service in 195...

BILL: 1953.

LIBBY: 1953, okay.

BILL: Right after I graduated from college.

LIBBY: And you married Betty in 1953.

BILL: '53, and that was a big year.

LIBBY: And it was a good year for you, and I know that you have five sons.

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: One of whom is our, currently our Deputy Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and he is the Director Designee, Dan Ashe, which you must be very proud of.

BILL: Well, I am proud of Dan; I'm proud of all my kids and they've all turned out well, some are more ambitious than others but that's the way it goes. You could see, here's a picture of Betty and me on our wedding day, and there's a picture over there of us at the wedding of her brother and my aunt.

LIBBY: I'll definitely take a look at that (laughing), that's wonderful.

BILL: A lot behind the pictures.

LIBBY: That's right.

BILL: And I tell, in this article I wrote for the Key Deer people, I recite that my first field trip was in September of 1953 with my boss Bob Lines. I was fortunate, I had good supervisors and I was having, going over with some of my supervisors in Boston a number of years ago. One law enforcement supervisor didn't like my rating, it was an average rating and he told me, "Bill, I've never gotten an outstanding performance rating from my supervisors. I've always had lousy supervisors." This was; I won't mention it.

LIBBY: Don't mention the name.

BILL: Yeah, and I said, "Gee, I'm sorry to hear that." I said, "But here's why

you got the rating." And I said [unintelligible@11:38]. And I said, "By the way, I always had good supervisors." And that's a very true statement. When I went to Atlanta, I was in what they called the Division of Lands, which is now Realty. And my supervisor, Bob Lines was a great guy; extremely well organized. And then the new Deputy, who had been the head of Realty, Bill Townes was an outstanding individual. So they were; they got me started on the right way. In college, my professors, one, a Dr. Keinholz and another one whose name escapes me right now. They were outstanding people, and I think it was they who launched me into really wanting a career in wildlife and forestry.

LIBBY: Those college professors can be so important. Did they know about the National Wildlife Refuge System or the Fish and Wildlife Service, or how did you...

BILL: Oh, oh, Dr. Keinholz knew everything about conservation.

LIBBY: Is that how you found out about the Fish and Wildlife Service? How was it that you got a job at the Fish and Wildlife Service; that you even knew...?

BILL: Well, you know, you simulate a lot of things. For example, I attended graduate seminars even though I was an undergraduate, and one of them was a seminar conducted by Dr. Gabrielson, Ira Gabrielson. So it's with these contacts and things that you develop an interest and you set the course of your future life.

LIBBY: Was Ira Gabrielson; he wasn't the Director at the time he did that seminar.

BILL: No, he had left.

LIBBY: He had been the Director already.

BILL: That's right, and in fact I met him later on when I was in Region 2 on the Masked Bobwhite Refuge in Texas; he used to go down there on bird tours. And at that time he was very, we talked for a whole morning because at that time I had a history in Region 4 and some Region 2, and he wanted to know about some refuges that he had been instrumental in creating. And I could tell him what had happened and how they were doing, so we had a long conversation. But back to college, these are the things, I don't think it's one thing that sets your interest, it's a combination of contacts and experiences that do and all of that has set me going. I could have, I took; at that time they had a forestry exam for college students that you took. And you're put on a register and I decided that I would rather go into the Fish and Wildlife Service than the Forest Service. I had done some work with the Forest Service when I was an undergraduate; I had gone as fire fighter, summers out west. So that, when I came to Atlanta with the guidance and contact of the people there that I mentioned, Bob Lines, Bill Townes; I became very satisfied with what was being done and what I could do. I had a very inquiring mind at that time and on my first trip that I referred to, was down to Florida, stopped at Ding Darling; I stopped first at Okefenokee, Ding Darling, and then the Florida Keys.

LIBBY: Were those the first refuges you'd ever been to in your life or just the first that you went to in a professional capacity?

BILL: The first I went to in a professional way. And it kind of set my professional course too as to, and interests; I was able to do pretty good things on each one of those refuges. Ding Darling was set up by Ding Darling, who used to winter at Captiva, which extends off of Sanibel. But it had a lot of problems because under the Swamp and Overflow Acts of 1850, the state had a lot of land interest in Sanibel in a way that made it, in the opinion of some people, notable Larry Givens, who was the refuge supervisor in Region 4 at the time, to recommend that we eliminate that refuge in the system.

LIBBY: So there was a recommendation to...

BILL: Well, if you know, yeah.

LIBBY: ...to eliminate the refuge?

BILL: That's right, because with the Swamp and Overflow Act the state had rights to certain categories of wetlands, which were really undisguisable from any uplands there. So we didn't know what we could manage or how we could manage, and I think it was one of his refuge biologists, Rudy Rudolph, who...

LIBBY: Rudy Rudolph?

BILL: Rudy, yeah, Rudy was the best refuge biologist I ever ran into. So Rudy and I undertook an effort to do what we could and Rudy wrote up a biological report, which cited the value, biologically, of Sanibel. And I looked

into the history of the Swamp and Overflow Act and other real estate type matters. And I worked out an exchange with the state of Florida through the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. What it was, was the state would convey all of the wetlands north of Periwinkle Drive, which is the road that goes straight through between the two township lines, it would convey all of their interests in the land under the Swamp and Overflow Act and we gave them lands at Anclote Key and St. Marks Refuge, they made a small park at St. Marks; I don't know what they did with Anclote Keys. But that gave us clear title to most of the lands in that refuge; now Sanibel is an island of about 12,000 acres, the refuge occupies somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000 acres there, so the refuge is half of Sanibel. And well, I don't need to explain to you, it's a good refuge from...

LIBBY: It's one of our most important refuges.

BILL: Well it's one, at least its people...

LIBBY: It's very visited and important for wildlife.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: How long had you been working for the Fish and Wildlife Service when you got involved with this project because this is...

BILL: Well, I got involved...

Libby: ...sounds like you were very...

BILL: ... right after that first trip.

LIBBY: Right, so you were very young in your career to have accomplished a major accomplishment.

BILL: It took maybe five or ten years to work all these details out, but it was done and it made the refuge. We did acquire some other lands, but most of it was acquired through that and that land exchange with the state of Florida.

LIBBY: So you're working in the Division of Lands?

BILL: That was Division of Lands at that time.

LIBBY: The program. And what was your title, were you a realty specialist or, do you remember your title?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: You're going to pull out your field diary.

BILL: I was a Forester Appraiser.

LIBBY: A Forester Appraiser, wow. That's a significant accomplishment in and of itself, and I know that you have contributed significantly to the establishment or the expansion of several over refuges, which I hope we can touch on during this interview.

BILL: Well, Okefenokee, Okefenokee; that was one of the other refuges that we started talking about. Okefenokee was, and this was one that the former Director was interested in since he was talking to me about it.

LIBBY: The former Director, oh Ira Gabrielson.

BILL: Ira Gabrielson, he was interested in it.

LIBBY: That's right, he had asked you about Okefenokee.

BILL: And Okefenokee was acquired from Hebard Lumber Company, 1937.

LIBBY: What was the name of that lumber company?

BILL: Hebard, H -E- B- A- R- D. And they acquired it in about 1909 and the 20 or so years that they had it, they logged the hell out of it. And it was what they called a highlead logging operation. They had railroads in the swamp and they took that cypress out like you wouldn't believe. And my first trip going through there, you could see some of the logging equipment still in the thing; the old railroad tracks, they had a small railroad that they put in there. And it was; it was a mess.

LIBBY: It didn't look like much, did it?

BILL: Even when I first went there, that was fifteen years after the Service acquired it and it was about 300,000 acres from the lumber company. I worked on that for 20 years on land purchasing, timber for land exchanges, land for land exchanges, and I probably added 50,000 acres to that original purchase. I'd go back year after year, and the last year I was in Region 4 in 1971, '72, you could almost not tell that something had happened to that. The protection we provided, and we put a road around the refuge that I was involved in. And later we made the refuge, or much of it, a wilderness area. And it's still the largest wilderness area in the eastern United States, as I recall.

LIBBY: All the wilderness or for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

BILL: I think of all the wilderness, probably three-fourths of the refuge, which is now about 400,000 acres.

LIBBY: When you were working on the expansion of Okefenokee and some of your other refuges, did you work very closely with the refuge manager and was a lot of your actions driven by what the manager wanted or was there an overarching goal for the region that you wanted to have certain refuges expand?

BILL: It was a combination, you know, we would; I worked closely with the refuge folks in a regional office, Larry Givens the refuge supervisor, Rudy Rudolph, Walt Stieglitz later on.

LIBBY: Walt Stieglitz, now what refuge was he managing?

BILL: Walt, he was one of the refuge supervisors in the regional office.

LIBBY: Oh, okay.

BILL: Of course he then went up to Alaska and other places. So when I left in the early '70's, Region 2, you could not discern that this area had been cut over to the extent that it had. One of the, later when the Endangered Species Act came into play, and the Land and Water Conservation Act, it gave us additional authorities for acquisition; alligators were in trouble, for example, at Okefenokee, a number of migratory birds in the Lower Keys, and we, in Region 4, used those Acts to the maximum. The 1966 Endangered Species Act, which was the first Endangered Species Act, authorized

fifteen million dollars that could be spent on endangered species acquisitions. We, in Region 4 at the time, got more than three-fourths of that money, 'cause we were ready and we were pushing. I really liked Okefenokee, that's one of my favorites.

LIBBY: That's a beautiful refuge.

BILL: Well, and it's one of the unique world wildlife, wetland sites.

LIBBY: Is it a Ramsar site?

BILL: Yes.

LIBBY: When you were doing land acquisition back in the '50's, what was it like working with; was it easy to buy land, was it easy to get support for conservation through land acquisition or was this; how was it perceived by the public and did it, it probably varied depending on where you were, especially in the southeast; I'm curious.

BILL: In the southeast, they weren't then as they are now, and remember, we were working through the Civil Rights period. And some of our acquisitions were tough. I would go in when I was working on Yazoo Refuge in Mississippi, for example, I remember visiting this woman; she was a real nice person. And we were talking, and I got up to leave and she said, "Don't you leave Mr. Ashe! I am not through talking to you!" (chuckling) She said, "I don't get much chance to talk to Yankees." So it was different; I always found that if you're going to accomplish something, you really have to work with the people on the ground, and your associates in the other divisions. And also other people; I showed you the

letter there with Pat Noonan. I had good relations with the states and would bring them together as much as possible. There were some people and some organizations that there was no hope in bringing together and you just threw down the sword and you said, "We are going to fight." So it was a different approach for different circumstances.

LIBBY: With you being a Yankee, as that woman described you, you were a Yankee in the south, was that a problem at all?

BILL: You know, it was and it wasn't. You know you may have differences with people but if you show them, look, you have a job to do and this is what you're doing, you don't agree with me, I don't agree with you, but let's forget that a minute and see what we can do that might be beneficial to each.

LIBBY: You probably had lots of opportunities in your life to take that little philosophy or approach and use it with people.

BILL: Oh yeah.

LIBBY: Many, many, many times, I'm sure.

BILL: Well, you know, with some I'm kind of hardnosed, with others I'm a nice guy.

LIBBY: Yeah, we'll get to some of those stories as well. What else did you accomplish, or some of the other major successes while you were in Region 2, and maybe something that, a disappointment, something that you weren't able to accomplish?

BILL: Well, I've had my failures.

LIBBY: Not Region 2, I'm sorry, Region 4.

BILL: Yeah, I had my failures. But I want to focus first on these three refuges that I went on my first trip; the other one is the Key Deer. And Bob Lines, my supervisor was with me and we went down to the Key Deer and we went to explore what was the situation there. The first regional director that I met in Region 4 was a guy named Jim Silver.

LIBBY: Jim...

BILL: Silver.

LIBBY: Silver, okay.

BILL: S-I-L-V-E-R. And he was interested in the Key Deer and he had made contacts and he was interested in the lower Florida Keys. He, one must say he got the things going, but then he retired a year after I came down there. But his successor, Walter Gresh, was just as interested as Jim on that and so was Bill Townes.

LIBBY: Who was Bill Townes?

BILL: He was the Deputy.

LIBBY: He was the Deputy Regional Director.

BILL: And Bob Lines, who was supervisor of realty or lands, and the refuge supervisor, Larry Givens; it's a group, these are as talented and interesting in wildlife group that I've ever come across in the Service. And I was fortunate that they were my bosses. So Bob Lines and I went down there and

first our charge was to see to what the political climate was and the Florida Keys was a tough area, I mean real tough. And to get land ownership in the area of Big Pine Keys, Summerland Key all of that Key are, which we were told was the heart of the Key Deer habitat.

LIBBY: What was tough about it? Was it just kind of wild, kind of no man's land?

BILL: The people .

LIBBY: The people.

BILL: Oh they were, Florida conks. And I mean they...

LIBBY: They had their own way, right.

BILL: That's right. And they were suspicious of anybody from other areas and we were from other areas. Anyway, Bob and I got that, nothing we could do down there because we had no authority. And the land ownership pattern was such that you couldn't conduct any real management activity there. However, three or four years later, the Key Deer Act was passed and then that was followed by the Endangered Species Act, and the...

LIBBY: We've got the Refuge Administration Act.

BILL: ...Land and Water Conservation Act.

LIBBY: So more in the '60's, the Key Deer Act was the late '50's.

BILL: It was 1957.

LIBBY: And had you, did you know the people; so obviously were people who supported Key Deer Protection.

BILL: There were and there were a lot of people down in the Keys. And of course you worked with those people and you worked with groups that were supportive, but the local government was kind of tough. And you worked; and as I said, at the time, this was messed up by the Civil Rights activities that were going on in the country at that time, and particularly in the south. So you had all of those things. Again, we used, and I used, the Endangered Species Act and the Land and Water Conservation Act, that provided funding for that and recreation activities on refuges too; Recreation Sites Act. So we used all of those things. And I don't know what was happening in the other regions, but they weren't as quick or they didn't recognize what the opportunities were and we did take advantage of it. And as I said, most of the money in the \$15 million authorization provided in that original Endangered Species Act came to Region 4. We spent on it Key Deer, we spent it on Sanibel, we spent it on St. Johns for Dusky Seaside Sparrow, we spent it on Okefenokee for alligator type protections, and there were a couple others that we used it. But we used it and funding was tough at that time and in the south, we used exchanges, you know, we'd have a good year in appropriations and we used the money we got. The next year we didn't get any money so we worked on land exchanges and timber exchanges.

LIBBY: Interesting.

BILL: And much of the land on Okefenokee was timber exchanges, and I

worked with the timber companies; I didn't always agree with them but they were interested in wood and I was interested in wildlife and we found we could work some things out.

LIBBY: That's really great because you took advantage of the situation that you had to try to make it work. You didn't have the funding, so you had to be creative and look outside the box. You were thinking outside the box, even in the 1950's, to try to make things happen.

BILL: And we, you know, on lower Florida Keys, Big Pine Key, we made some critical purchases were advantageous to the survival and wellbeing of the key deer. And Jack Watson, as I point out in this article...

LIBBY: He was the refuge manager, the first refuge manager?

BILL: Yeah, and he was an icon.

LIBBY: So he's the first refuge manager of Key Deer Refuge.

BILL: That's right. And I said, "Professionally after working with him," that's Jack Watson, "for over a decade," I came to know Jack well. At the same time, I was working on several score of other federal and state areas. I traveled a lot in my planning, coordinating, appraising, and negotiating work. Therefore, whenever possible and convenient, I would take my family on some of my business trips, the Keys and Sanibel Island were popular destinations. And it proved productive for the Service, it produced one chief of the refuge system, maybe a director. But I'd leave them and I'd go work all day and then come back and sometimes I would take

them. On Sanibel after I went to Washington I set up a workshop down there to show the other realty people around the country how you could creatively accomplish things without just money.

LIBBY: Correct.

BILL: And the refuge manager was taking my family across Tarpon Bay and one of my sons, you know here I am a semi-wheel from Washington and the refuge was a GS-9. And we were going along and one of my sons said, "When are you going to get promoted to a job like this, dad?"

[laughing]

LIBBY: You were in the regional office at the time?

BILL: I was in the Washington office.

LIBBY: Oh, you were in the Washington office at that, and how old was your son, do you remember? It wasn't Dan?

BILL: No, he probably was about 10 years old.

LIBBY: He thought being the refuge manager was the coolest job.

BILL: Oh that was great, that was great to him.

LIBBY: We still think that way. So you helped establish the Key Deer Refuge, you bought that land for that. How was that refuge established, was it through Presidential Executive Order?

BILL: It was legislation.

LIBBY: Legislation.

BILL: Yeah. So I said, so my family came to know Jack Watson well; he fascinated the boys with his wildlife cop stories, apprehending Castro Cubans, anti-Castro Cubans, who had the temerity, to conduct war games on one of his refuge islands, this was Annette Key. And he did, he got, he was by himself, he got 15 of them, he took their weapons away, he confiscated their boat; this was Jack Watson and he wasn't taking anything from anyone. Jack was a person of significant accomplishment, but he also knew how to embellish a story, and I'm talking about my kids now, which only entranced my sons more.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: I said; "Jack Watson in many ways was a big man in physical appearance, in character; I am reminded of a Chicago Bear linebacker, tough, fierce, intimidating in the protection of his refuge and his wildlife." I can recall an encounter with two hippie types, remember this was the turbulent '60's, who were going to take down his flag. He came back to the office one evening and there were two long-haired, young characters and one was up the flag pole. And Jack was very colorful, in his speech too, I don't know how his secretary took it, but she did. He said, "I came back," he said, "and there were these two guys and one of them was up my flagpole." And I said, "Well, what did you do, Jack?" He said, "I took out my gun and I pointed and I said, 'You son of a ---, you better get down there or I'm going to blow your feet off!'" [chuckling] We don't do that these days...

LIBBY: No, we don't.

BILL: ...but those were different days. Anyway, I said, "He got down." He said, "You bet your..." And so when I, a couple days later I was getting through my work and as I usually did, I stopped in at the refuge office and tell what I found and what I had done, and he said, "By the way Bill, do you know what those two suckers did? They went to the sheriff to report me for pointing the gun at the thing." And he said, "You know the sheriff's a friend of mine," and Jack, he had, he said, "The Sheriff told them, son, you tried to take down Jack Watson's flag and you're still standing!" He said, "If I were you, I would go home and say a prayer! He's the toughest son of a bitch in Monroe County!"

[laughing]

LIBBY: Well, I don't know, I think it's great to hear stories about somebody like Jack Watson; I had never heard of him so one of the benefits of doing this oral history with you is that we're kind of hearing about some other people as well.

BILL: Yeah, well, Jack was a character; he was well known at the time, and there were some old ones. The refuge manager at Wheeler Refuge, and his name escapes me, I'll remember him this afternoon. He even worked longer than your maintenance person for the Service, he worked over 50 years. And there were some real characters, that guy wrote a weekly article in the Decatur, Alabama paper and he was well regarded locally too. But there's a lot of human interest in the work that we did and you come across it. And you know the article they sent me about Jack Watson, and they wanted a comment. I said, I

was forced to smile by the statement in the email sent me that Jack Watson was a well-known environmentalist responsible in part for the creation of the National Key Deer Refuge on Big Pine Key. I said, "That's not the Jack Watson I worked with and knew. To my knowledge, as I said before, he was not a part of creating the refuge but he was a significant factor if not the significant factor in the success of the refuge and the restoration of the dominative whitetail deer. I don't think that environmentalist applies to Jack Watson either. That title wasn't even known when, back then, at least it wasn't in my college dictionary circa 1950. Nor do I think Jack would have accepted such an appellation, he was what he was; a hardnosed focused, dedicated, resourceful wildlife protector. A wildlife cop respected by all in the lower Florida Keys." And I go on to recite what I just told you, "Which is why the perspective refuge chief in Atlanta, Larry Givens, chose Jack to be Key Deer Refuge manager." He was the first. And he got along with local people, he ran, he was the chief of the volunteer fire department.

LIBBY: So Bill, this interview's about you but I want to tie it back to what you're reading; you're reading me about a remembrance about the first manager there. And when did you write this?

BILL: I wrote this about three, four years ago.

LIBBY: So even though you've been retired from the Service, and when did you retire?

BILL: 1990.

LIBBY: 1990, you're still, people are still reaching out for you, to you for your remembrances and this was something that you wrote for an anniversary at the Key Deer Refuge, the 50th Anniversary...

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: ...of the refuge; that's wonderful. That's important, I hope that that is, if we can have it in our archives, we really should. I'm finding the stories about Jack Watson, are fascinating and again as I said, it's a way of keeping everybody alive and the history alive. You wanted to tell me about your first trip and you did, Okefenokee, Sanibel or Ding Darling Refuge and you're wearing a Ding Darling shirt today.

BILL: I gave a talk to the staff down there and this was my pay.

LIBBY: That was your pay, it's a beautiful polo shirt. When did you give that talk to them?

BILL: I don't know, maybe five, six ago.

LIBBY: Five or six years ago, right; you're still an inspiration to us. And then you talked about Key Deer. I know you did some work at, you spent a lot of time working on Yazoo Refuge, Mississippi; do you want to talk about that at all?

BILL: Well I did a lot of work on Yazoo, Piedmont Refuge in Georgia, the half a dozen others down there, but Yazoo was another special one. It was started in the 1930's, and the Service acquired about a section of land right in the middle of the current refuge; 600 plus acres. But then local opposition

caused them to stop, the refuge was caput, so I was given the assignment twenty or twenty-five years later to see what we could do there. And I went out and the acting refuge manager was guy named Raymond McMaster; Mac was a, later the refuge manager at White River, and what could we do? So we started the acquisition and that area was dominated by an old meander in the Mississippi River that was cut off, Swan Lake; Swan Lake Hunting Club, this was all the old bosses in Washington County, Mississippi. So it's a story of working with people and working against people. A part of it was, there were a number of lawyers involved and one of the names, Rife Wade, and the other was Jim Robertshaw. Jim Robertshaw was an ivy-league trained lawyer and Rife Wade went to Old Miss. The hunting club was made up of the elite of the Washington County area, plus some bigwigs who were scattered statewide or nationwide; they were formidable. Rife Wade was a real good, they were both real good lawyers, but Rife Wade was a good ole boy. And he wasn't good enough to be a member of the Swan Lake Hunting Club, maybe his genetics weren't up to par or something like that. But anyway, when I would go over to negotiate to work out things, the first one I would contact was Rife Wade. And we'd start the conversation like, "Well, how's Ole Miss going to do this year?" [chuckling]

LIBBY: It's big topic down there.

BILL: Yeah, and we would get started and I would hear all about the local issues and problems as Rife Wade would know it, and I would do that before that I went to see Jim Robertshaw, whom I had to negotiate for the thing. We needed to get, before we could continue, we

needed to get state approval. And so I went, in Mississippi those farmers, and the lands were usually owned by real well-to-do people.

LIBBY: Right; big tracts of land.

BILL: Yeah. And I was going to work on; I went to see the refuge manager and he said, "What tract are you focusing on?" I said, "I'm focusing on the Cosser tract." "That's not the most important tract we need to get, we need to get the one on Straight Lake in the middle of the refuge." I said, "Well we, priorities change." Well, Lee Cosser was a real estate person in a small town east of Greenville. And I went to see him and we worked out a price, but I said, "One thing Mr. Cosser, you understand that I'd like to do this but we need to get Governor's approval." And he said, I said, "If we get Governor's approval we could do this real quick." And he said, "You know my son," I said, "Yeah." He said, "You know he's Governor Coleman's Chief Aide, don't you?" I said, "Is that right?"

LIBBY: Oh, I bet you didn't know that!

[laughing]

BILL: So we got the Governor's approval and that knocked Jim Robertshaw's plans for that right out.

LIBBY: And then buying that one property helped all the other, it was sort of like, fit the domino.

BILL: That's right, and you know sometimes politics supersedes biology; you have to know what you're doing. And we later, there were some black people who lived down on that, a real,

everyone had a story and they were all interesting. Eventually we figured we had to condemn the Swan Lake Hunting Club; that was an area of wetlands in all them oxbow. And we got; I have to think now. All this hunting club owned was the hunting rights, they didn't own the land, the lands were owned by the people by private owners.

LIBBY: By private owners.

BILL: And the private owners weren't members, most of them weren't members of the hunting club, they weren't prominent enough. So we, in our condemnation, we got the people to raise up against the Swan Lake Hunting Club, saying, "Hey you can't sell your land to us, and there ain't going to be any other buyers unless we can acquire the hunting rights. So you have to work on the hunting club one way or another." They did, we condemned the Swan Lake Hunting Club and their hunting rights along with the private lands and we had agreement with private owners. So that's essentially how the Swan Lake, how the land was acquired and made a refuge.

LIBBY: That didn't have any adverse implications; I mean it must have been a lot of angry people.

BILL: Only among the people who were members of the Swan Lake Hunting Club. The people who owned the land and who couldn't hunt that property, they, over the years there was an antipathy that built up.

LIBBY: Yes, I understand.

BILL: And did I take advantage of that? Possibly.

LIBBY: You just worked with what you had to work with.

BILL: Anyway, they tried to get the Governor's right, or approval rescinded, Swan Lake Hunting Club, but there was a lawsuit on that and the result was that once the Governor gave you the approval he couldn't take it back.

LIBBY: Now did you use a lot of migratory bird money, was there migratory bird money at that time available?

BILL: That was, yeah.

LIBBY: And so you used a lot of duck stamp money to buy that?

BILL: Yeah, that was, that was a source of funding. That was one of the areas that Dr. Gabrielson wanted to know about. The other was Piedmont Refuge, you know about Piedmont?

LIBBY: You know I don't know much about Piedmont.

BILL: Piedmont, the government at the time had had a program where they would try to buy these poor farm lands that were owned by poor blacks and poor whites and move them off the land and it was, you know it was designed to help them, not hinder.

LIBBY: To give them an opportunity to go someplace else and they'd have some money.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: And Piedmont's in Georgia.

BILL: Piedmont's in Georgia...

LIBBY: Where about?

BILL: ...south of Atlanta about 80 miles. And like a lot of those lands, tremendous erosion, real erosion, sheet erosion, you name it. And that was true of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center too. And, oh, I'm trying to think of the other one in Mississippi. Well, we worked on that, and I was telling Dr. Gabrielson, "Yeah, our people have done a great job." I said, "You wouldn't know this area now, Dr. Gabrielson." I said, "Once you stopped growing crops on those lands and doing things that shouldn't be done, let it go back into forest, you wouldn't believe what we're having." I said, "And getting a lot of wildlife, and getting deer back there." And I said, "Wood duck, particularly coming in." Oh man, he would just; he was the architect of getting those lands. So there were about five or six of them, St. Marks was one of them.

LIBBY: St. Marks was the first refuge I ever went to.

BILL: Oh, did you.

LIBBY: When I went to Florida State University.

BILL: Well, St. Marks a little different, it's somewhat coastal; these were in the Piedmont.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: And they were subject to tremendous erosion, but I said, you know, you could go down there and I said, the land eroded and I said and the soil went down into the gully, so to speak. And I said, you got cheese with a site index category of a hundred. And I

said then, you know what site index is? Well, it's a measurement that foresters use, it's how high a tree will grow in 50 years. And I said, but you go on the ridges where the soil, I said, it might be twenty or twenty-five. And I said, but it is a fantastic area. I said, "My boss and the refuge supervisor go hunting for wood duck down there."

LIBBY: So, all this time you're working in Region 4, you're not really an administrator, you're really on the ground doing a lot of...

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY:you're doing the land acquisition.

BILL: That's right. Later on, toward the end of my thing there, I was the supervisor, which is, I would supervise the work but I was also...

LIBBY: In Region 4?

BILL: ...had hands on.

LIBBY: Right, you became supervisor in Region 4.

BILL: Then I moved to Washington for about a year and a half, two years.

LIBBY: Oh, okay. And where did you work in Washington?

BILL: In realty, I was the Chief Appraiser.

LIBBY: Oh, I never knew that about you.

BILL: Yeah. And then that was my least productive period in the Fish and Wildlife.

LIBBY: And why was that?

BILL: Oh, I don't know.

LIBBY: You weren't there very long.

BILL: No, that's what, that's the usual quote, and I tell people, "Well, some people learn quicker than others."

LIBBY: You were in Washington for what, about 18 months or two years?

BILL: A year and a half, two years. And then I went to Region 2.

LIBBY: And what was your position in Region 2?

BILL: I was head of the realty office.

LIBBY: You were Chief of Realty, okay. And what year would this be?

BILL: Should be 1972 to '74. And a part of that story is told in this book here; I had, I wrote an article back then.

LIBBY: And the book that we're looking at is called, *Wildlands Philanthropy: The Great American Tradition*. Who wrote this book? Oh it's essays, right? Essays by Tom Butler.

BILL: Oh yeah, Tom; Tom was in Vermont.

LIBBY: Okay, with photographs by, photographs and a dedication. So you wrote; tell me about this book.

BILL: Well, they talk about big donations and, with Pat Noonan when I was out there, with Pat Noonan, I worked out what is probably the largest, in terms of size, donation of land through the Fish and Wildlife Service; it's the largest donation in terms of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

LIBBY: Was Pat with the Conservation Fund at that time?

BILL: I worked with the Conservation Fund, this woman...

LIBBY: Well, let's say the refuge we're talking about is Sevilleta.

BILL: Sevilleta.

LIBBY: In New Mexico, right.

BILL: And this woman's father...

LIBBY: And the woman we're talking is...

BILL: Elizabeth-Ann Campbell now. Her father was General Campbell, who was the largest wheat grower in the world. And he owned many hundreds of thousands acres scattered all around, and one of the tracts was in New Mexico. Well, and she, her father had died, she was a principle in the trust that was managing and controlling the property; a real nice lady. She had tried to give it to the Park Service and they didn't want it. It was overgrazed in a fantastic way, and she had tried to give it to the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Service said no.

LIBBY: So first she tried to give it to the National Park Service and they said no, and then she came to the Fish and Wildlife Service, and we said no.

BILL: I didn't say no, whoever she came to at that time.

LIBBY: Right, somebody said no.

BILL: And I said, "Now I'm ready. No one was interested at first, it would have been a hell of a thing to manage for most organizations and it was very, in a very degraded condition. But along with Mrs. Knapp, I thought that it had tremendous long-term potential." It was actually in the area where four desert biomes connected and you could see some of the real tracks from people who were homesteading and moving out west, I mean, it was that kind of property. And it said, "But like Knapp, Ashe saw extraordinary potential in the Sevilleta landscape. "Conservation," I said, "is a long term business."

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: And I suggested to her, and she was a big wheel, she lived in Princeton, New Jersey, but very emotional. I suggested she go to Washington D.C. and lobby officials in the Interior and I would work locally, and it said, "It worked." I wrote an article on this, I was looking for it but I can't find it; I wrote an article for the Nature Conservancy; this is something I worked out with Pat Noonan. She didn't want anything for the land, but she wanted their expenses covered. And this is where Pat could help, he got in touch with the Mary Cary Flagler Foundation in Florida, and some of their board, three or four members came out here and I took them over, flew them over Sevilleta. And they put up \$500,000 to cover the expenses and I estimated that the property was worth maybe 10 or 15 million dollars at that time.

LIBBY: How many acres was it?

BILL: Two hundred and twenty thousand.

LIBBY: And this was the largest donation to date...

BILL: In the Fish and Wildlife Service, maybe in the federal government.

LIBBY: Right. And you think that's still today.

BILL: Probably, well, yeah, no question. And we created, we didn't want people; it's very political there, this was a Mexican territory and I worked with Pat and we created language, we would donate it to the Nature Conservancy and they would do what's necessary and then convey it to the Fish and Wildlife Service. We worked hard, in fact, I was in New Mexico, my wife and I were in bed, it was 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock and I got a call and it's Pat Noonan; he and I were, and my wife said, "It's 11 o'clock!" I said, "No, it's not. It's only 8 o'clock in Washington." [chuckling]

LIBBY: You guys worked hard, always working. How long did it take for this donation to actually occur and then...

BILL: Oh, this was short, this was about six months.

LIBBY: And then how long did the Nature Conservancy have it before it became a National Wildlife Refuge?

BILL: Oh, a month or two.

LIBBY: Wow!

BILL: Yeah. And you know I wrote an article on it and I wrote Tom Butler. I said, "You know the article is very flattering for the Conservancy." I said, "And they did good work." But I said, "My office and my people did 90% of the work, and almost a 100% of the creativity in setting this up." But anyway there's no grazing, there was to be no grazing on it; this was the direction of the Service; no grazing, no mining, no whatever, just protection. And the idea was that it would take 50 or 75 years to bring this land back to real productive lands. Now this is where they're incubating the gray wolf.

LIBBY: Right, now they're doing that now.

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: But at the time, was, did people think that this would be a place where you...

BILL: I wrote an article and said this is what it can be used for and should be used for, and there should be research on restoration of these arid areas. And in fact, that's what's being done as I understand.

LIBBY: I remember going to Bosque del Apache for personal pleasure in...

BILL: That's my wife's favorite refuge.

LIBBY: I love Bosque. In probably 2002, I think we went right before I moved back to Massachusetts. And driving through Sevilleta and it was closed for research and it was known as a research refuge.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: Is it still a research refuge basically?

BILL: That's what I put in this article at the time. Three or four months after it was transferred to the Service, Pat Noonan asked me to write an article about it, which I did. And that, in effect, I outlined what the management objectives ought to be, and as I understand basically they're still the same.

LIBBY: And they're working on is the Mexican wolf?

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: The Mexican wolf and has it been introduced there?

BILL: Well, they would, probably but the idea was that they would incubate and get these wolves up to a certain stage and then send them out to...

LIBBY: I see; they're head starting them.

BILL: That's right. And it says here, "There is no doubt today, that the forward thinking vision, Elizabeth-Ann Campbell Knapp, William Ashe and Pat Noonan shared for Sevilleta was correct. Time and nature's recuperative powers have launched a resurgence of wildlife at Sevilleta." This is a quote I made, "I was there 25 years after the acquisition and the change was remarkable, said Bill Ashe. It still has a way to go, but if it continues it will be one of the real gems of the National Wildlife Refuge System."

LIBBY: Fantastic. To have the vision is, that's one of the things that people when they think about you, they know that you're a man of vision and that's one of the parts of your personality and your contribution to the refuge system, that makes you stand out is because of your vision and that's a perfect example of it.

BILL: And it is going to be one of the, just like Okefenokee. Okefenokee, the cutting will have been, not forgotten, but it will not be a big factor in the long term. As I said, conservation is a long-term business, we don't operate on today and next week, it's next year, next decade.

LIBBY: So when you were the Chief of Realty in Region 2, then Sevilleta was your most outstanding success.

BILL: Yeah, there were a number of things that we worked, Texas's coastal refuges, but this is the one that demanded a little different action.

LIBBY: And you were there from 1972 to 1974, only two years?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: In Region 2?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: And then you came to Region 5?

BILL: Yeah. One of the things that I was sent out there, I had helped develop the Realty Program in Region 4 into one of the most progressive in the county and got things different. Went to Washington, it was a mechanic job there,

so I didn't; they were having problems in Region 2 in Realty and the supervisor that they had had, and I went there and I worked with the Regional Director real well, Bill Nelson, great guy. And he didn't want me to leave. I served there, also as Acting Deputy Regional Director because the Deputy Regional Director who was there retired. And even though I was the newest kid on the block there, he, Bill, put me in that position. I did restorative work for certain organizations, and that's why Lynn Greenwalt called me up and asked me to go to Boston. I don't know if you heard, but Dick Griffith was having trouble with Ecological Services and others at that time.

LIBBY: He was the Regional Director.

BILL: Yeah, and you know I liked Dick; he was one of the smartest guys I ever came across in the Service, but he was a very authoritative presence.

LIBBY: And now it's the 70's and we don't take authority all that kindly.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: In the mid-70's.

BILL: And he, I got along good with him; he knew my reputation, and there were some compliments to the Secretary's Office about him by people in Ecological Services particularly. Dick worked very closely with the Corps of Engineers, which was all that helpful to the Service. But mostly my job was in Region 2, was areas like this and getting the regional realty program functioning in an effective manner. And when I felt that was done...

LIBBY: And Lynn Greenwalt is the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, so the Director calls you and says, "I'd like you to go to Region 5 and be the Deputy Regional Director."

BILL: That's correct.

LIBBY: You said, "Okay."

BILL: Well....

LIBBY: Or did you did say...

BILL: I said, "Let me think about it, Lynn. I've been moving around here lately quite a bit and it's tough on my family, particularly my wife."

LIBBY: You had how many children still home at this time?

BILL: Five.

LIBBY: Oh, all five kids were still at home?

BILL: Yeah. Dan was in college, and so there I go.

LIBBY: But it is coming home, back to New England.

BILL: That was probably one, that's right; that was probably an important factor. And I knew the state directors here, in fact a couple of them were classmates of mine.

LIBBY: And the office was in Boston in the McCormack building?

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: Right, which I never worked in. I met you in 1998 when we were in Newton Corner.

BILL: Yeah. Well, I don't know how that move came about but it was downtown and people were leaking out all over the place to shop, and to here and there. And the Region 5, at that time, was considered the poorest functioning region in the Service.

LIBBY: Really.

BILL: And I think we changed that.

LIBBY: I think you did; I know you did.

BILL: And we, you know, that was one of my functions in the Service. I was sent to Region 2, or I went there to help out their Realty organization and we did; that became a very viable, functioning program activity. And moved to Boston, now you know you talk about failures, I had them. Anybody in this business who tries to do something is going to have their failures. One of them, we're going to visit next month, we go to the North Carolina Outer Banks, the family goes. Well, I tried to get the Outer Banks from the Virginia, North Carolina line down to Duck.

LIBBY: Down to where?

BILL: Duck.

LIBBY: Duck, okay.

BILL: As a refuge. And I; this came up at one time and understand this was in Region 4 and I'm now in Region 5. And Jim Pulliam didn't want to have anything to do with that. All the county

commissioners, all five of them, were opposed to it.

LIBBY: And Jim was the Regional Director for, in Region 4 at the time.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: He wasn't supportive.

BILL: Well, I don't know, he wasn't, he just didn't to do it.

LIBBY: Oh, he didn't want to do it, right.

BILL: And I volunteered.

LIBBY: Oh, I see.

BILL: And we spent two years, three years, working on the county commissioners and from an opposition of five to zip in two years, we got it changed through support, five to zip, and we got a lot of public support. The only thing when we go the public support, we got a President name Reagan and a Secretary named Watt.

LIBBY: Oh yes.

BILL: And I told people, I know when I'm out classed. And I said, they just, and they said, "You're not working in Region 4, Bill, you're going back to Region 5."

LIBBY: Was it that they didn't support land acquisition or...?

BILL: That's part, was part of it.

LIBBY: It was part of the...

BILL: And people who were opposed to it had direct contacts to the Secretary and the President.

LIBBY: So I know this wasn't your region, but would you say this was the first time in your career where there was not support for land acquisition at a higher level in the organization, not for any particular parcel of land but just in general?

BILL: Well...

LIBBY: Or had we gone through these swings before, or these cycles before?

BILL: Well, you know you get them, this is when the real opposition started. There were periods in the '50's, '60's, and '70's where, the states might oppose something and you drop and you figure you're not going to waste your time. And the effort for the gain wouldn't be worth the effort because you'll probably lose, more than likely. You have to take cognizance of at what the politics are. But we did get, I think four or five thousand acres there as a refuge.

LIBBY: Is that Pea River or Pea Island?

BILL: No, Currituck.

LIBBY: Currituck, okay. So it wasn't a complete failure.

BILL: No.

LIBBY: But it wasn't what it could have been.

BILL: I was looking for thirty thousand acres in protecting that whole thing. And we're going down there and you look at what has developed on that thing, and

one of my arguments in support of the refuge was, hey, this is a storm prone area, it's a very important bird sanctuary, and other wildlife. And one of these days there's going to be a hurricane come and it's going to cost the government 50 billion dollars and here we can protect the area and at a cost of several million dollars. Well, that didn't sell with the new incoming administration. So you win...

LIBBY: Interesting because we also had that legislation, the CBRA legislation had passed, or maybe CBRA came after this; remember that Coastal Barrier Resources Act?

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: Where the federal government wasn't going to be putting a lot of money in to support development of coastal areas.

BILL: Oh, that's a cop out.

LIBBY: You would think protecting it through a national wildlife refuge would make sense.

BILL: When I was in Region 4, to go back one of the things, I had a lot of fights with the state of Louisiana, with the oil companies, with the parish politicians about what was being done on those marsh areas. I mean they would put pipeline channels through there and we would tell them what's going to happen. And you know we told them what would happen, has happened. But hey, the Fish and Wildlife Service and Bill Ashe against oil companies and the governors and the senators and the parish officials, no way you're going to

win, and the Corps of Engineers. No way.

LIBBY: So you're now in Region 5, and despite the fact that the North Carolina protection didn't go quite as you had expected, you are spending; you're working now obviously on Region 5 projects. Tell us about some of your big challenges and successes there.

BILL: Well, one of the things that kind of happened, it started in Region 4 and kind of ended in Region 5, was Dismal Swamp. I was in Washington when I was in Region 4 on, went up on some kind of a meeting assignment and I was through, and I decided I'd stop in at the Nature Conservancy office before; I had a couple hours before my plane taking off. And Pat Noonan came and he said, we were talking and he said, "Hey Bill, would you be interested in Dismal Swamp?" I said, "I don't know. What've you got?" He said, "Well, Union Camp has 50,000 acres of land that they want to give away, it's more of a problem to them." And I said, "I don't know, let me look at it. Give me what you have and I'll check." And I went back to the regional office and Larry Givens was from Virginia and he knew about things like that. And we had a land acquisition review committee meeting and the region was interested. So we set up and we, I had a biologic and acquisition team up there and we looked at it and we came back and we said, "It could make a good one, there's going to be some problem along the west side with the land owners but other than that, we could do it." And I left the region at that time and I came all the way to Boston and here it was, again, and we acquired the Great Dismal Swamp, you know it's not your typical

refuge, waterfowl values are so but it has a lot of; you know I always said, you know we're not the Fish and Waterfowl System, we're the National Fish and Wildlife Refuge System. And this is something worth looking into. And we completed the project up here in Boston when I came back, took five years with that.

LIBBY: So that refuge was established while you were the Deputy Regional Director.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: I didn't know that.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: I, Great Dismal is one of the refuges I've never been to; one of the few refuges in Region, one of the few refuges in Region 5 I've never been to, I need to get down there. I have been to Back Bay and I heard from Paul Nickerson a story about you and an issue at Back Bay that I thought you might want to share with us. It had to do about a road and apparently you had to stand up to some pretty big guns. Do you remember?

BILL: The details are a little fuzzy but I do recall that issue. Another one was the refuge along the river there, the bald eagle.

LIBBY: The James River, or Presquile?

BILL: James River Refuge.

LIBBY: James River Refuge.

BILL: Somebody told me, "There's a lot of eagles down there in this area

here.” And I said, “Well, I guess we should, I guess we should look into it.” And we sent Paul Nickerson down there. And he came back and he said, “God, I saw 250 eagles in this one spot in short...” So I said, “Well, let’s consider making a refuge there. Well, we need to look at it further.” And Don Young, did you know Don Young?

LIBBY: I did know Don Young. So Paul Nickerson was the Chief of Endangered Species at the time.

BILL: That’s right.

LIBBY: Okay. And Don Young was the Regional, Assistant Regional Director for Refuges.

BILL: Right. And Don Young, great guy, but Don was the efficient manager when you talk about looking down the road and vision, that was not Don.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: He was, and he said, “God,” he said, “we’ve got more land than we can take care of now.” And I said, “Don Young, when I came in the Service over 20 years ago,” I said, “I remember attending a land acquisition review committee meeting and that was the lament of some of the people there.” I said, “At that time, we had like a 150 refuges covering maybe 40 million acres,” I don’t know the exact amount. And I said, “and if we follow advice then,” I said, “we’re now 350 refuges, 80 million acres,” I said, “if we follow that advice then, we’d still be at that lower number.” I said, “Paul, go look, let’s look at it in more detail.” And I said, “We would, we get more; we may not get all the money we want to manage it,

but we do get more money and we have gotten more money than we were talking about when I was a GS-5 in Region 4.” So we kept moving on. I used to kid Paul, you know, one of my tactics was to get the best people I could for jobs, in particular, key jobs. And Paul was in Washington and I had heard about him and the message was he wanted to get out of Washington, and especially wanted to get back to Region 5. So we would, we got him up there, but every once in a while, and Paul’s kind of a free spirit, you know he would disagree with you. And I’d say, “Paul, where were you when I came down, or came to this Region?” He said, “I was in Washington.” “Would you like to go back there?” [laughing]

LIBBY: Well, what he told, I want to come back to people in a minute, but the story he told me about Back Bay Refuge had to do with the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks at the time was Ray Arnett. And Ray wanted to put a road in through Back Bay, right through the heart of the refuge and you said, “No.” And as Paul said to me, “Well, Bill stuck around, and Ray didn’t.” So obviously you won that battle, but do you remember that?

BILL: Yeah, Ray Arnett was, he was a piece of work. And he, somewhat same thing happened on our Long Island Refuges. I went into the offices one day and Howard was there, and he said, “Bill, you’ve got to stay until six o’clock tonight.”

LIBBY: This was Howard Larson, who was the Regional Director at this time in Region 5.

BILL: I said, "Why?" He said, "We got a problem in Long Island and Ray Arnett is pissed off!" I said, "Well, he's normally, that's his normal condition, Howard." [chuckling] So I stayed until six o'clock, I normally stayed later but six o'clock we got the call from Ray Arnett and some of his, and this was the conversation that was supposed to be between Ray Arnett and Howard. Howard did not say a word; it was between Ray Arnett and me. And when something like this, "I got a congressman here who wants to spray the refuges on Long Island Sound."

LIBBY: For mosquito control.

BILL: For mosquito control. And I said, "Mr. Arnett, you understand what our policy is on spraying, don't you?" "I don't give a--" he had the colorful language. I said, "Well, that may be but we have to pay attention to it up here." And he said, "I want you to send a letter out authorizing the spraying for mosquito control of these refuges." And he named a couple. And I said, "You understand we also have an agreement with the Park Service about mosquito control on these refuges." "I don't [unintelligible@1:50:56]." And I said, "Well, you don't care and you don't..." and I said, "but we have to." And I said, "And as long as they're there, the decision is ours, we're going to abide by what our policy and what our agreements are." And he exploded, and he said, "You're going to sign it." I said, "We can't and we won't sign the letter up here." I said, "However, you're the boss, if you want to send a letter out like that, it's your privilege and of course we will have to abide by what you do." Of course he didn't want to sign a letter, but anyway it went on. And Howard was

quiet, and he; I said, "You send us a letter, you sign it, and we'll do what you sign; that's our obligation." It went on a little bit but that's how the conversation ended. And he did send a letter, but I told him, you know, I said, "If you do that," I said, "and within 30 days you're going to have a lawsuit and we're going to lose." Well anyway, he signed the letter and guess what, within 30 days we had a lawsuit and we lost. [laughing] And so I was always, because of that and a few other things, the Back Bay thing, I was always referred to as that "bleeping deputy of yours."

LIBBY: Oh yeah, so you were a trouble maker. But that wasn't the only time you stood up to somebody in power, in authority, in the line of authority. And at the beginning of this interview, I said that you retired as the Deputy Regional Director and then I realized that just a few minutes ago, well actually that's not true, you didn't retire as Deputy Regional Director.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: And that's, as I remember, is because you stood up to somebody in authority.

BILL: Well...

LIBBY: Do you want to tell us that story? And maybe my perception of it is incorrect so I think it would be good to have it for history.

BILL: Well it's; there were a number of incidences where. One involved Don Perkuchin.

LIBBY: That's the one I'm thinking of.

BILL: Well, you know we were having our staff meeting on Monday morning one time and somebody said, "Don Perkuchin is real sick, the doctor thinks he has a heart condition." And the thought was, Don has a heart condition? He jogs, he's out in the field quite a bit and he cited these symptoms and a couple meetings later we went over, and I forgot, one of our guys says, "He doesn't have a heart condition, he has Lyme's disease." Well, at that time, the doctors didn't know what the hell Lyme disease was; they didn't have a clue. And sure enough, they checked it out and we diagnosed the case in a regional office meeting, he had Lyme disease. But anyway...

LIBBY: He's a manager at Blackwater Refuge in Maryland at this time, right?

BILL: Right. But anyway, he was enforcing the law at Blackwater and he had cited a couple of congressmen and some other political types that were rather influential in Washington with the Secretary's office at the time. And we, Howard and I, had a visit from Director at that time.

LIBBY: The Director was Frank Dunkle.

BILL: Frank Dunkle.

LIBBY: And the Secretary was?

BILL: Same guy.

LIBBY: James Watt or Hodel, Don Hodel?

BILL: I don't know.

LIBBY: Okay, but I know Don, right; Frank Dunkle was our Director.

BILL: And he came up and he said, another time Howard said, "Bill, you've got to come in on this." And Dunkle said, "We've got a problem at Blackwater." And I said, "Yeah, we have a lot of problems at Blackwater." I said, "It's too near Washington D.C." He said, "Well, your refuge manager isn't doing his job and he doesn't get along with the local fellows." And I said, "Wait a minute, Frank, are we talking about the same guy?" I said, "He's doing a great job and I know for a fact that he gets along with the local folks." I said, "There may be some political types he doesn't get along with." "Well, you need to transfer him." "What's the reason, why would we do that?" "Cause he's not doing his job." I said, "You know, I don't give him his performance rating, but," I said, "I do review it. And according to everybody, he's doing a great job." "Well he's not doing a good job." "Well, the people who are supervising him say he's doing a great job." And, "Well, you've got to transfer him." I said, "Well, what would be," I said, "I don't see that we have a reason to transfer him here." And he, "Well, you're going to transfer him." I said, "Well," I said, "I'm the person who has to approve that." That was one of my responses," and I said, "I don't see any reason to do that." I said, "Frank, if you want to transfer him," again I gave the same kind of thing, "You can authorize us to do that and we will have to do it. I will have to do it, but I will object. And that's where we're going to leave things." Well, and that's where we left it.

LIBBY: Did he go to Howard or were you two together?

BILL: We were both together, Howard did not like to handle personnel activity.

LIBBY: I could get that sense.

BILL: Huh?

LIBBY: I get that sense.

BILL: And it was my responsibility, I reviewed the, I supervised the program supervisors and rated them and then I was the review official for whomever they rated, key people. So it went on and about four months later, I called Don and I said, "Don, I'm going to give you some advice, you can say yes or no." But I said, "I'm going to advise you to accept an assignment at Okefenokee, the refuge there." I said, "I know that refuge and it's suited to you and you would do a great job there?" And I said, "Now understand, you're being punished, but the punishment says that you will be promoted to a GS-14 and you will get a raise in pay, of course, and because it's a 14 refuge." And I said, "I know you're going to like that job. And so think it over and give me a call." And the next day or so, he gave me a call and said, "Okay." And a year later I was at a meeting and he and his wife came up and he shook my hand, and she gave me a big hug. And he said, "You know, you were right, Bill. I love this refuge!" And I said, "You don't mind the increase in pay either do you?"

LIBBY: And how long did he stay at Okefenokee before he retired?

BILL: I don't know, but it was several years.

LIBBY: Yeah, right, and I know he did well there. But that was, but you stood up to Frank Dunkle.

BILL: Well, if that's standing up to him, I wasn't going to; I was going to do whatever Don wanted because he deserved it. And that's what I think people have to understand, exactly. Executives, you give people responsibilities and if they do that responsibility, you support them. And you defend them.

LIBBY: Well, how was it that you became the head of the Coastal Program?

BILL: Well, you see that rafter up there at the top, that was done by Glenn Kisner.

LIBBY: Oh, wow.

BILL: And Glenn was in charge of our activities at Chesapeake Bay.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: And from that, and from other things, I said, "You know we have a lot of responsibilities that stand in the coastal areas. We have coastal refuges, we have species that go and they blend in with NOAA activities and EPA activities. And we need to expand our program in the coastal areas; we have a presence, a significant presence, but we need to expand what we're doing in a more definitive way. So I pushed, and we got a Coastal Estuaries Program started and I mean we had Delaware and we had Texas and we had Washington and Oregon. And I developed relationships with a couple of people in EPA and NOAA. And I said to EPA,

“Look, we have the people and the facilities, and you have the authority and the money.” And I said, “If we work together, we can do something really significant.” And we started it, but then I left the Service. And then I don’t know what happened. I know we moved on but it wasn’t in the vigor that I would have hoped.

LIBBY: I think the Coastal Programs depend a lot on who the project leader is in terms of how visionary they are and how effective they are of pulling together partners.

BILL: That’s true. But you also need some leadership from the Washington office level. It needs to be directed there, not necessarily through the Regions, but there has to be good clear policies and activities.

LIBBY: So you managed that program for a couple of years though and then you retired?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: My impression is, is that you didn’t really want to not be the Deputy Regional Director anymore, that you...

BILL: Oh, I was moved out of that job.

LIBBY: You were moved out of that job, because of this issue with Don Perkurchin.

BILL: And others.

LIBBY: And others, for standing up and...

BILL: I was Howard’s “bleeping” deputy.

LIBBY: And when Howard ended up going down to Florida to run a fish, it wasn’t a fish hatchery, it was a fish center right?

BILL: I don’t know what it was.

LIBBY: Right, and then we had to change. So you retired, you worked in the Coastal Program for a couple years, you helped get that off the ground. I think we have a very successful Coastal Program in Region 5, I don’t know anything about the other regions.

BILL: Well, we got that started, we got the Delaware Bay.

LIBBY: And the Gulf of Maine office Program is great, and southern New England, New York Bight Coastal Estuary Program Office, which is now headed up by Sharon Marino, is just doing fantastic.

BILL: Oh, is it, great, great. I lost contact.

LIBBY: So you retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service in 198-?

BILL: 1990.

LIBBY: A couple things I wanted to ask you about, before we kind of wrap up your time with the Fish and Wildlife Service is, I know that you are very proud of a number of the people that you brought into the Fish and Wildlife Service or that you promoted into the Fish and Wildlife. When your name is mentioned, there’s a lot of folks out there that really feel that a lot of their successes related to your, you being a mentor to them.

BILL: Well, I am glad about that now.

LIBBY: And why don't you tell us, because I know that you were very strong on promoting women in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

BILL: Well, you know...

LIBBY: And an early time before people really, now I don't think we think about it too much.

BILL: Well, back yonder, it was a male dominated entity. And you know the project leaders, or I call you folks, refuge managers, the first one Linda Gintoli.

LIBBY: Linda Gintoli, the first female refuge manager in the entire country.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: You hired her?

BILL: Well, I didn't hire her but I pushed along the idea that talented women need to be recognized.

[casual talk]

BILL: And, well, there's a lot of other areas.

LIBBY: Well, we might do that in the second interview, like maybe we'll do a post-Fish and Wildlife Service.

BILL: Okay, the...

LIBBY: We were talking about Linda Gintoli.

BILL: Oh yeah. Well one of the second ones was Robin Fields, I think too.

LIBBY: Yeah, Linda Gintoli was the first female refuge manager in the whole

system and she was at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, which is where I currently am the manager of. And then Robin Fields?

BILL: Yeah, she was among the next to follow and then you took off from there.

LIBBY: There was another woman named Mike Gantt.

BILL: Oh yeah.

LIBBY: You remember her?

BILL: Oh, I can't forget Mike.

LIBBY: Now, did you hire her, or you were involved with her when you were in Region...

BILL: Mike, no, she was in a part of the problem at, oh what was the refuge in Maryland when I first came here?

LIBBY: At Patuxent, was she at Patuxent?

BILL: No. And, oh, at Annapolis.

LIBBY: Oh, okay, she was in the field office.

BILL: She was in Ecological Services. And this is a letter that she wrote me; she didn't come to my retirement but she wrote me that letter when I retired.

LIBBY: Her name is really Linda, but she goes by Mike.

BILL: Linda, that's right. You'd think, she was tough as any man, I'll tell you that.

LIBBY: This is a very nice letter. She said, "You took time out of your busy schedule to visit the troops at the Annapolis Office. I always felt you listened to what we had to say and you heard us. You offered remarks about politics and how it plays into complex, controversial, environmental decision making. You said we should always do our best, present the facts, the facts would never get you in trouble and that if for some reason or another, the recommendations were changed by higher management, the field deserved an explanation. I've never forgotten how sensible and impressionable those words struck me; I still believe them." That's a wonderful, see that's how you impacted a lot of people.

BILL: Well, she came to a meeting up here, I think was with Lucy Wallace and she wrote a note then. There was another letter that struck me; I've got ladies, they remember more than men.

LIBBY: So you feel that you were instrumental in trying to help change some of the perceptions that women couldn't be managers.

BILL: Oh, I think, at least in this region and I think it carried over too, and another person too, was Karen Mayne.

LIBBY: Oh yes, I remember Karen, she was incredible, is incredible. She's retired now.

BILL: I know.

LIBBY: Wonderful. She retired a few years ago.

BILL: Read the last two paragraphs.

LIBBY: Well, she says, Karen Mayne who was the supervisor for years at the Virginia Field Office in Ecological Services and very well regarded for her work. She said, "You've always been my hero and the person I consider my first and foremost mentor in the Service. Even though I did not rise to a level of higher leadership that both of us might have expected, I hope I met your expectations by creating a cadre of excellence scientists here in Virginia and mentoring several folks who went onto other of positions of leadership."

BILL: There's something behind that. I would have conversations with Karen and try to get her to move higher in the organization, 'cause I had a high regard for her. And she was tied to Virginia and tied to a gentleman...

LIBBY: I know.

BILL: ...she worked with; oddly enough, for the Corps of Engineers. So I accepted that, but I let her know that anytime she wanted to move up I would be glad to help her. And she did do things that were positive and helped other people, so I don't know if there's a loss. My career was stopped when I had these incidents that you're talking about, but I don't regret them.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: And I think they were worthwhile, and it's good to have the regard of our associates and people who have worked for you. And I had a great career. I have no regrets. You know my son Dan, he has a lot of ability and he has a smoother personality than I do; he takes after his mother in that regard.

And so the traps that I had to negotiate, he can negotiate better.

LIBBY: He probably learned a little bit from you too because he saw what happened to you.

BILL: But I would do the same thing over.

LIBBY: You stand by principles.

BILL: Whatever.

LIBBY: You do.

BILL: And I, you know, you mentioned women, well it was pragmatic. I always said you get the best people you can and you smooth the path for them; you're a blocking back so to speak. And I always, for as long as I remember, said, "You know we have this tremendous resource and they're women and they're being held back for whatever reason." I said, "Well, some of us could do something about it, and let's see what we might do about it." And there were some good things that happened. And like, as you say today, hey, so what else is new.

LIBBY: Right. I feel that Region 5 was the leader in promoting women into management positions. And I think you, as a woman in management, that I was about to get this job just because I was seen as the best qualified person at the time who was interested in the job and it didn't really matter what my sex was. And you really helped and I really appreciated that.

BILL: You know, I, this has a number of connotations, our Director Bob came from Region 2, but he, anyway, he had a

thing going with one of our women biologists.

LIBBY: Jantzen.

BILL: You got it.

LIBBY: Bob Jantzen.

BILL: You got it. And she was sent up here and she was in charge of refuges. And she was a capable person, I never got along because of the, the reason I didn't create any road blocks. But one of our refuge people in the regional office, whenever when he would greet her, he'd shake her hand and he'd squeeze. And she was his boss, and he gave her a hard time. I called him in the office, I said, "You know," I said, "I didn't select this lady for that job, but she was sent up here not to fail." And I said, "As far as I'm concerned, she's not to fail because of things that we did, you and I." I said, "If she fails, I'm going to take the blame for it and guess who I'm going to take with me." And, so it ended there. There were little blips like that. This is just the kind of thing that happened.

LIBBY: Well, in a course of a 37-year career, not everything goes smoothly, but overall have an awful lot to be proud of.

BILL: Well, you know, there's a lot of areas that we can talk about, Canaan Valley is one.

LIBBY: I know we could keep on talking, you've been talking for almost two and a half hours. I think we should bring this interview to a close, but I'd be happy to come back and talk some more. And we could talk about some other

things in the Fish and Wildlife Service that you did. In terms of perspective, and maybe just, we really didn't talk about some of your highlights but in terms of your thoughts for the future of the Service or where you see us heading in the next decade, we could spend a little time on that now or we could do that later. I think that you of all people, a second interview with you to talk about your post-Fish and Wildlife Service career because so much of it tied back to into the Fish and Wildlife Service, you were still very involved with the Fish and Wildlife Service even after you retired, and you moved onto two positions with two organizations that directly impacted and benefited the refuge, as well as you stayed in touch by teaching at NCTC, giving lectures and things like that. I would like, I'd like to maybe come back or we could take a break.

BILL: No, well, let's take a break now or come back. I have been active, you know I was a selectman for a long time here on the planning board, on a thousand committees.

LIBBY: You and I are on a committee still together.

BILL: Oh, that's right.

LIBBY: We're on a committee together.

BILL: And in the '90's after I retired, I was president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. And by the way, the Refuge Manager of the Year, that was a thought of mine. I tried to get some award like that when I was in the Service, I sent it to Washington, and "Oh, what a great idea!" But nothing ever happened, it went to Washington

and Fisheries people would object and Ecological Services people said it somehow diminished their role, things like that. You get this office kind of politics and everything, but anyway. When I got with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, I didn't have to get approval from the Service. I said, "We need to recognize the refuge managers." And I got into it and I said, "Well, we need to recognize the volunteers too." And then I said, "Well, we're recognizing a certain segment of the refuge system, we need an employee award." And we got it through, and the only thing is on; we deal with wildlife, but we deal with wildlife through people. And I think the more you reward people for things they do, the better off you and the organization are going to be. So I would like to see that program, talking to my son, I said, "You know, there ought to be, Fisheries people ought to have similar awards and then the people in Ecological Services, or have a Wetlands Award or something like that and recognize people." Then I said, "You could have a Fish and Wildlife Employee of the Year Award." We'll see.

LIBBY: Well, we'll see.

BILL: And I lost most of the awards I have; my wife says, "They're upstairs somewhere!" But anyway, that one right there on the side, under the...

LIBBY: Under the kestrel?

BILL: Yeah, that's from the President for the work that was done on the North America Waterfowl Management Program. And, when I was with the Foundation, it wasn't my favorite President.

LIBBY: George Bush, number one?
[chuckling] But still, that's pretty
impressive to have a framed award from
the President.

BILL: And I, that one was from the
National River Watershed Association
up there. I put these, because they're
representative of different, where this is
at the town of Harvard Citizen of Note,
and that was from the Nature
Conservancy. And I got one over there
from Ducks Unlimited for my wetland
activities.

LIBBY: Beautiful, yes.

BILL: Well, it's on the desk, I think.

LIBBY: Well, a life well-marked, work;
well-marked by people. You have a lot
to be proud of and you're still fighting
for wildlife and for conservation in your
83rd year.

BILL: I had a good career, and a good,
and worked with good people.

LIBBY: I know when you speak, people
listen. I want to thank you for this time.
I look forward to coming back and
talking to you some more, 'cause I know
there's so much more we can cover and I
would really like to talk more after, with
your work with the National Wildlife
Refuge Association and the Friends
groups, your work with the National
Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and we
could talk about Oxbow Refuge.

BILL: Oh, yeah!

LIBBY: About one of my favorites, of
course, but I think for now we'll say, I'll
say goodbye.

BILL: Okay.

LIBBY: And I'll see you later. I thank
you, Bill.

Part 2

LIBBY: Hi, this is Libby Herland, I'm
the manager of the Great Meadows
National Wildlife Refuge and I'm here
in my office with Bill Ashe, who retired
from the Fish and Wildlife Service in
1990. This is part 2 of the oral history
that Bill and I are doing for the archives
of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Today
is October 7, 2011; this is, as I said, this
is part 2 of our oral history. Bill and I
recorded the first part of his oral history
four months ago on June 9th, 2011 at his
home in Harvard, Mass. We covered a
lot of ground back in June, Bill, but there
was still an awful lot to talk about, so
we're going to try to pack in some more
history in the next couple hours. And I
know you have a lot more stories and
there's a lot more things that people
would like to know and hear your
remembrances about, your recollections
about, and maybe some explanations of
some things that happened. So I think
we're going to try to talk about Oxbow
Refuge, Canaan Valley, the
establishment of NCTC. I have some
questions from some members of the
Heritage Committee going back to the
Florida days. And then we want to talk
briefly about the work that you did with
the National Wildlife Refuge
Association and the National Fish and
Wildlife Foundation when you retired. If
we have time, maybe we'll hear a few
stories about our current Director, your
son Dan Ashe. And I would really love
to finish up with some words of wisdom

from you. I know that you have spent a lot of time talking and thinking about management and being an administrator, and I think it would be nice to share some of your thoughts with our audience. So with that, let's start. Is there any particular subject you'd like to start with?

BILL: Not really.

LIBBY: Not really, well, why don't we start with Oxbow Refuge since I'm here and I'm conducting this oral history. Oxbow is one of the eight refuges that makes up the Eastern Mass. Refuge Complex, which I manage. So I love to hear a little bit about the establishment of Oxbow Refuge and your role in that.

BILL: Well, I came to Massachusetts in Region 5 in 1974; that was a time that the military was excessing Fort Devens. We knew from studies that had been done that portions of Fort Devens was excellent wildlife habitat. And I had had a background in realty work and I knew about the disposal requirements for any federal lands. And there was a study made and it indicated that the south post would be a good addition to the refuge system; that was about, as I recall, about 700 acres. So I worked with the military to have those, which are being excessed by the military, transferred to the Fish and Wildlife Service. There were other lands that were retained by other federal agencies, the military prison, the hospital prison. And so we worked that out. The studies that I had done indicated too, that the south post would be, which is several thousand acres, would be a good addition to the refuge system and as part of the Oxbow Refuge. And two years after the initial action, we got wording in the Defense Appropriations Bill that

when and if these lands were to be disposed of by the military, and they will be disposed of in some future time, maybe sooner than we think now, they would be added to the refuge.

LIBBY: Yeah Bill, I have a question about that, that was the 1996 Department of Defense Appropriations Bill and we do have that in our files here. What I'm concerned about is that at time might come when no one's around to remember that that was in the 1996 Department of Defense Appropriations Bill.

BILL: I am taking actions in letting people know that this is, this could happen and this is what the law now says.

LIBBY: Well, I was wondering if it was somehow binding on the Department of Defense, that it would transfer to us since it was in an Appropriations Bill that has a, it's for one fiscal year and that fiscal year is actually now 15 years ago.

BILL: I believe if you read it, it says if and when, and I think maybe we ought to look at that wording. And I think it's binding for any future disposal of those lands by the military.

LIBBY: Well, we'll definitely have to look, maybe that's something that you and I can work on together here.

BILL: Okay.

LIBBY: Yeah, because the south post has got some remarkable habitat for wildlife and it's currently 5,000 acres. So that would make a wonderful addition to the Oxbow National Wildlife

Refuge and to the network of conservation lands that are in area.

BILL: Well, you know it had broad value, it has, as I recall, it has waterfowl value. It has such unique things as butterflies and other critters.

LIBBY: And it may have the largest population of nesting grasshopper sparrows in the state.

BILL: There we go.

LIBBY: It's one of them, if not the largest. Great. And you did that, you were living in Harvard at that time.

BILL: That's right. And I think Chet Atkins was on the Appropriations Committee, he was our Congressman.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: And we worked that out. And you know an answer to your initial question; I think it's a continuing obligation of the military to take that into account. And as you know under the disposal laws, federal agencies have a first crack.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: At lands that are to be excessed or surplused.

LIBBY: Right, we've picked up a lot of lands at this refuge complex that are excess military properties, so right. Was it different for you working on Oxbow Refuge compared to other refuges because it was literally in your backyard?

BILL: Well, at the time...

LIBBY: Almost...

BILL: I was on the Harvard Planning Board at the time, so I was able to influence what was going on in the town. I was later a selectman in, I still think I have a little bit of influence on local action as a result of 25 years in elected office.

LIBBY: Right, that's right. And all that elected office in Harvard, was all after you retired?

BILL: That's correct.

LIBBY: So that was one of the things that you did after you retired, you went into your whole second career, which you had was very distinguished. Well, I know some folks wanted to know a little bit about Canaan Valley and Mason Neck, and maybe we'll take a little trip to the southern part of our region here and talk about those refuges.

BILL: Well, Canaan Valley, the Appalachian Power Systems was going to create a flooded power...

LIBBY: Like do some hydro power type stuff?

BILL: Yeah, stuff like that. And we had a report from Ecological Services that, that wasn't the thing to do, to that particular land. It was good to habitat, and as you know, Canaan Valley is reflective of an environment far to the north and its plant and animal species were reflective of that. It was a relict area, so to speak. We stepped in and I was the person who was leading the Service action, had support from the state wildlife agency, but they couldn't act alone. And so we delayed the thing,

the Corps, the power company needed a 404 permit to do what they wanted to do and we opposed that permit but they got the, I don't know what agency, I forgot. It was, that denial was overruled but we worked...

LIBBY: Would it be CEQ? The denial of, was it a Corps permit that was being denied?

BILL: Yes, but we...

LIBBY: Oh, EPA is the one that would, I think can override Corps permits.

BILL: Well, whatever my recollection is a little dim on that aspect. But we worked at it, and I recall I brought the Fish and Service Director, Lynn Greenwalt, to come and Jim Pulliam, who was head of refuges in Washington at the time, and I got their support. It was a very delicate, political situation. Anyway, they planned on going ahead and doing their thing, but a funny thing happened on the way to approval. The Corps denied the permit for, the Corps Colonel was the district engineer, Colonel Janeiro. He denied the permit, then he retired a week later. [laughing] But anyway we had a Corps denial, and they went to court, Appalachian Power Systems, went to court and we tied that thing up for eight or ten years. They had a Corps, they went, they appealed to the district engineer and the division engineer and they didn't get anywhere. They appealed then to, in the court to the Circuit Court of Appeals, and they denied it, and denied certiorari, which means, of course, that it didn't go to the Supreme Court; but it was about ten years in legal action. And then the end result is we won.

LIBBY: There was a lot of opposition to the establishment of the refuge, though, as I remember; Tucker County, the Conservation Commissioners, weren't they opposed or?

BILL: Well, they wanted the power, yeah.

LIBBY: Did they eventually support it though?

BILL: I don't think so. But there was enough local support for the refuge and enough support in the state that it muted their opposition; we worked hard.

LIBBY: I know you did.

BILL: We played the political game. It was still being worked on when I retired but we had a Service employee, what was his name?

LIBBY: Bill Zinni, you thinking Bill Zinni?

BILL: Bill, no, another one in Ecological Services.

LIBBY: In West Virginia?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Was he the project leader?

BILL: I think...

LIBBY: Chris.

BILL: Chris Clower.

LIBBY: Chris Clower, yeah.

BILL: Chris was a real, he took over and he worked real hard, and eventually things worked out, it became a refuge.

LIBBY: It's a beautiful refuge. I have been there and it's the 500th Refuge...

BILL: Yes, that's right.

LIBBY: ...in the refuge system.

BILL: I was given a little plaque to celebrate that.

LIBBY: It's now 16,192 acres, so they're still buying land down there, I think.

BILL: Well, they haven't bought, that isn't much more than the original. I attended a ceremony they had about two years ago down there. And one woman who represented one of the conservation organizations, I won't say which, but anyway, and she was telling how much work her organization did and I had to roll my eyes, I didn't say anything. I could have said, "Lady, you don't know how much work went into this."

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: "You're just the cleanup crew."

[chuckling]

LIBBY: Well, I know they still, they still have to work down there but it's a beautiful refuge, so lots of competing interests in how that land would be used.

BILL: I would imagine. West Virginia is West Virginia.

LIBBY: Yeah, but that's a great place. What about Mason Neck? I don't know

what your involvement was with Mason Neck.

BILL: When was that established?

LIBBY: I don't know if; this little report here that I have doesn't indicate when it was established.

BILL: Anyway, I was in Region 4. So it had to be in the 1960's, late 1960's. There was a big controversy in Virginia and on Mason Neck; Mason Neck was the birthplace of what's his first name, Mason?

LIBBY: Elizabeth Hartwell, the official name of it is Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck.

BILL: Liz Hartwell didn't have that much to do. She was a supportive group, but she had little to do with what actually happened and what actually was approved. Anyway, there was a roadway that was going down the river and it would cross Mason Neck. And there was a big development company that had bought Mason Neck, and it caused a commotion. And it reached the Secretary's Office, Udall, and he went to a meeting and he became excited and he said at the meeting, "We're going to save that thing, we're going to make it a refuge."

LIBBY: Did it have bald eagles on it at the time?

BILL: No.

LIBBY: No, okay.

BILL: No, there were none. So there were two people that were sent up to look at it. Oh, the refuge biologist, his

name escapes me, and I. And the only way we could buy it was for, was with duck stamp money. I'm trying to remember the guy's name, the refuge guy. Anyway, we came back to the region and in a land acquisition review committee, I had told them quite frankly we couldn't get duck stamp money; the waterfowl values weren't there. And if we tried to get it through the commission, we knew they would deny it, there was a congressman from Missouri, Congressman Carson, who is tough on areas. But I said, you know when I do studies like this I look into the history of the land, and Mason Neck, historically, was a roosting area for American bald eagles and had hosted large populations. And I said, two years earlier in 1966, the first Endangered Species Act was passed and there was another law that provided funding for it. I said, this is under control of the Secretary and if he was really hot to trot for this refuge, he would see that that money was available.

LIBBY: That was the endangered species money, right?

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: You had told me about 15 million dollars.

BILL: Well, in 1966, that was the first endangered species legislation, and he controlled it. And a big player in it was the Nature Conservancy, they bought out that company that invested in buying it, and they were hurting, 'cause they, they were hurting financially.

LIBBY: Who was hurting financially?

BILL: The Nature Conservancy.

LIBBY: The Nature Conservancy was, okay.

BILL: And so we got it approved and then we got the money to buy the land from the Nature Conservancy.

LIBBY: And how did you get the money, through appropriation?

BILL: Yeah, well through...

LIBBY: Through the Endangered Species Act money?

BILL: Through that Endangered Species Act money, and as I said, the Secretary controlled that pretty much. And then he had made this commitment to the local people, and he; Secretary Udall was a pretty, pretty great, good guy. And that was the story.

LIBBY: That's pretty exciting, yeah, that's a great story.

BILL: A couple of years ago, my son Dan would recruit to play on his, he was on the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Commission staff at the time, and he would recruit me to play with their softball team; I was a pretty good softball player. And after the game was over, this must have been in the early '80's, and I said, "Hey Dan, look up there, what do you see?" I said, "It's a bald eagle, and it's probably nesting on..."

LIBBY: On Mason Neck. When I went to Mason Neck, it was a long time ago, I saw bald eagles there.

BILL: Well, when was that?

LIBBY: Oh gosh, it must have been about 1988, 1989.

BILL: But when we first looked at, there was no sign of a bald eagle there; the nearest population was in Chesapeake Bay. But we told the Land Acquisition Review Committee, we think you can get them back and just provide the habitat and the protection.

LIBBY: Were you working in Region 4, or Region 5 at that time?

BILL: I was working in Region 4.

LIBBY: Still in Region 4, okay; 'cause Virginia was part of Region 4?

BILL: That's correct.

LIBBY: Right, okay. Wow, your legacy continues, it's amazing. The more I talk to you, the more I learn about your involvement with protecting refuges. I know that was a big part of your life. I think it might be interesting to see if you have any good stories about Ecological Services or Fisheries or even law enforcement when you were the Deputy Regional Director in Region 5, because then you moved from Refuges to the entire Service on all the Service programs. But before we go there, could we just talk a little bit about the establishment of the National Conservation Training Center.

BILL: Yeah, I met with the; I had a meeting and a couple Center people were there, you mentioned the name before, who were the two people who work on the history....?

LIBBY: Mark Madison.

BILL: Yeah, and I happen to just mentioned that we, in Region 5, conceived the idea of the Center and the Training Center. They were surprised, they said there were, occasionally some mention of that but nobody paid any attention or gave it any thought. And I said, "Well, let me send you something." I said, "Because we," and it was a brochure that we had created in Region 5 for the Eastern Shore of Virginia Refuge. And it outlined what the goal of the thing would be and what policies it would cover, and they were, pretty much identical with what the, what was ongoing at this Center in West Virginia was at the time.

LIBBY: Now was the Eastern Shore of Virginia, was that a former military base as well?

BILL: That was a former military, naval base.

LIBBY: Naval base, so they had buildings and they had land.

BILL: Oh, they had, yeah. And I said; we had a staff meeting, our supervisors one day and we were talking. And it came what would we do with the Eastern Shore of Virginia Refuge. And I mentioned was, "Well, can we use it as a training thing for Service people?" We were thinking of the region primarily. And, "Well, let's look into it." And we developed this brochure, very nice. And we got a law passed.

LIBBY: Oh really?

BILL: Yeah. What happened is there was some opposition in the Service, 'cause some people in refuges, by the way, they thought it might compete with

our training center in West Virginia, Beckley.

LIBBY: Oh, Beckley, right, which is where our law enforcement used to be held and refuge academy.

BILL: So we got the law passed, but they worked on a certain person who is close to the President, Reagan, and he vetoed the bill.

LIBBY: Oh!

BILL: So Congress passed it but they got the President to veto it. And I said, "Here's the brochure." So we had everything going to establish this training center in Maryland.

LIBBY: Or Virginia, Eastern Shore of Virginia.

BILL: Eastern Shore, right.

LIBBY: Right. Do you remember what year this was, or what years you were involved with this?

BILL: No, I could check it in my diary but we had Karen Mayne involved too. I should show what a good thing it was and how we could get people from Washington down there and training people. I had a group come down, one of them included was Ron Lamberston, and showed them it was just a hop, skip and a jump from Washington. And you know, with an area on Chesapeake Bay, all sorts of wildlife potential there.

LIBBY: That's right.

BILL: And so we couldn't beat the President.

LIBBY: So what was the facility in Beckley, West Virginia like?

BILL: I don't know; I never was in Beckley.

LIBBY: Right, I never went there either. But I remember that, I think they had, I think they had law enforcement training there but maybe I'm thinking of refuge management training. But I do remember hearing about Beckley, but that was way before my time.

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: So did you end up planting the seed then for the establishment of NCTC by doing that, but did that come around shortly after that?

BILL: Well, it came up and I think what we had prepared, the seed bed for Eastern Shore of Virginia, and the brochure, that was picked up even though the President vetoed it. And of course we had a strong senator in West Virginia and some appeals were made to him and he could see the value of an area like that too, West Virginia. I was not involved in that, but I was with my staff involved in creating the idea in the seed of it.

LIBBY: And you've been to NCTC many times, haven't you?

BILL: Oh yeah, that's a great area.

LIBBY: And you've been as an instructor or a guest speaker?

BILL: No, yeah, I spoke a number of times in refuge classes down there.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: But my son has too, I guess.

LIBBY: I'm sure he's been there many times, absolutely.

BILL: So the germ was appointed up here.

LIBBY: Another example of your vision, you definitely were a visionary.

BILL: Well, you know, that's something that I would like to talk; I don't know if it's the right time in this interview, but that's something the Service needs to work on, is vision and change. We have people now who staff, the makeup of the Fish and Wildlife Service has changed. It used to be tough, good ole boys who ran things and they were good and they probably came around at the right time. But as an organization matures you do need to look ahead, and that's an area where we lacked; it's something that I saw, I wasn't an exceptional person in that but I did like to look ahead. And get the right people and work on the things; one of the things I mentioned when we were talking about Mason Neck, getting the money. Region 4 got about 75% of that 15 million dollars, that's 'cause we worked at it, other people were thinking about other things, well, that's okay. But that money went into Okefenokee, it went into Sanibel, Key Deer, Mason Neck, and the other guys were still working on Duck stamp money, which is fine.

LIBBY: You knew, you took advantage of the opportunities that came up; you were ready for them, but you also could see the value and the potential for using that pot of money.

BILL: Well, it's something that I think the Service needs to work on more, be opportunistic.

LIBBY: Is this advice you provide to your son by any chance, or do you not talk to Dan and give him advice?

BILL: Yeah, we talk; you know my teaching in the Service is pretty much by example. What we were doing in Region, you know the word in Washington was act like Region 4. When I came, Region 5 was not a very aggressive area back then. There were a lot of conflicts, had a regional director who, I liked him but he was the old guard, he was probably one of the brightest guys I ever met in the Service.

LIBBY: Yeah, who was that again?

BILL: Well.

LIBBY: Oh, let me see if I can look it up. You mentioned it in your last session.

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Why don't you keep on talking while I look this up.

BILL: Well he, there were conflicts, particularly with Ecological Services and the regional director; he had strong ties to the Corps of Engineers. And in fact there were complaints lodged in the Secretary's office against him, but he was a heck of a good biologist, but he was of the old school and he wasn't about to change in any way.

LIBBY: Dick Griffith, is that who it was?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Dick Griffith, yeah.

BILL: Dick, when I came here, I think I came here because, asked to take this job because I knew the area; I had good contacts and I had a good record of managing. And Dick and I got along well, in the year or so he was here and I was here, I knew he was the regional director. And he set the thing, I tried to convince him of how other ways to do it, and I was partially successful. And he; who was in charge of the Ecological Services Office back then?

LIBBY: Well, was it Gordon Nightingale?

BILL: No.

LIBBY: Before that or after that?

BILL: I think before.

LIBBY: I probably don't know. I didn't even know Gordon, I just remember, I think he was there before Ralph Pisapia and that's who was in charge, he was the ARD for Ecological Services when I joined the Service in 1988.

BILL: But anyway, the region was in tough shape, it was difficult to recruit people to the region partly because of that, and partly because what wildlife is in the northeast.

LIBBY: Yeah, common misperception right.

BILL: And I would talk to people and I said, "Do you like to fish?" I said, "You're an hour away from saltwater fishing, you're an hour away from good

trout fishing. Do you like to hunt?" I said, "Here are the species you can hunt, you're an hour away from that and the scenery is as good as anything." One thing I would emphasize is that there is a lot of interest here in the northeast about wildlife. We have about 1% of the refuge lands, for example, but we have about 25% of the refuge use, people use.

LIBBY: That's exactly right.

BILL: And I talked people into it and by the time I left the region, we had no problem in attracting.

LIBBY: Were you in the McCormick building when you first came here?

BILL: Yes.

LIBBY: So you were right in downtown Boston.

BILL: Downtown, and I worked to get us out of there. I'd say, too many escapes from the McCormick building and too many shopping areas.

LIBBY: That's right, I remember you said that. So [chuckling], great. Well, what about Ecological Services and Fisheries, you have any specific accomplishments or recollections that you might want to share with us?

BILL: You know when I came here, I had a free hand in refuges from the regional director, and he was a fisheries biologist, so I kept out of that area.

LIBBY: Now are you talking about Howard Larson?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: 'Cause I know you served mostly under Howard.

BILL: I kept out of that. Howard was a fishery, and he would let you know he was a fisheries expert.

LIBBY: I didn't know that.

BILL: Ecological Services, I was deeply involved in and you know when I was here and Dick Griffith was here and the [unintelligible@44:07] I told you. A good example was, one day Mike Bartlett came up with a letter for me to sign; he brought it up himself. And I said, "Mike, you know the regional director is opposed to this." I said, "You know." And I said, "You know, I agree with you," I said, "but he is the regional director and he had made his feelings known." And I said, "I'm not going to sign it. Now we can work together to change his mind, but this is not the way to run a railroad because we'll just have a big fight." And Dick Griffith, he was, Dick as I said, he was one of the smartest people I ever came across in the Service and he was a good guy. But he had fixed opinions and he was very much authoritarian in his style and you just don't create problems, you kind of live with them and try to change them, but you don't create them.

LIBBY: And did Mike go along with that? He had too.

BILL: Yeah, what was he going to do? I was his boss. [chuckling]

LIBBY: Right, you were his boss, right. Mike was at the retirement party for Marvin Moriarty that...

BILL: Oh was he?

LIBBY: ...you guys were not able to make, unfortunately because of the weather.

LIBBY: Yeah, so.

BILL: Mike, Mike was okay but he was not averse to playing those little games himself.

LIBBY: Was he in the, so he was working in the regional office at that time?

BILL: Oh yeah.

LIBBY: Yeah, he hired me.

BILL: Did he?

LIBBY: Yeah. I owe a huge debt to Mike Bartlett.

BILL: Well, I had a good relationship with Mike, him as a staff person; he did good work. You know, you have these things with people, Paul Nickerson was another character, and he was one of the good people I recruited from Washington. But Paul had his own way sometimes and he would try to work you or work around you on occasion. So I called him up to the office, I said, "Paul, how do you like working up here?" Of course this is Paul's home area, and he was unhappy in Washington. I said, "You know, you're working in a certain way that gives me a little problem." I said, "And if you would like to go to, back to Washington, I can make an arrangement for that to happen."

LIBBY: And he straightened up right?

BILL: Well, I had no problem, well, Paul was okay, but these are the little

things you have to take. And you know my management style; I wasn't a teacher in that context. I tried to set an example and...

LIBBY: And you led by example.

BILL: Well, that was, what it is. I supported people when they were right and that's support of staff, cut short my advancement in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

LIBBY: That's right, that's right.

BILL: But that's okay.

LIBBY: That's okay.

BILL: I still get letters and notes from people who...

LIBBY: And you can sleep at night.

BILL: I don't have trouble.

LIBBY: That's right. Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about, just have a couple questions from some, from Paul Tritak, who's the manager now of Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, but he had been the manager at Pelican Island. So he had a couple questions and I thought maybe we could talk about them. He wanted to know what role you had, if any, in keeping the state of Florida from claiming Pelican Island under the Swamp and Overflow Lands Act. Apparently, I guess at one time, they wanted to acquire the island or they said it was theirs.

BILL: Well I; that was one area where I was the key person. I tell you that working with the trustee of the Internal Improvement fund and letting them

know that they would have a lot of problems if they tried to do anything. And we worked out this agreement, or lease agreement we called it, with the water bottom surrounding Pelican Island, and it's safe.

LIBBY: You had a lot of involvement with that particular act because when we did the first part of this oral history, you were telling me about Ding Darling Refuge.

BILL: That's right. Well, Ding Darling is in the same problem, if you notice Darling Refuge and if you know the law, the federal lands and the state lands are so intermingled.

LIBBY: And that's the way it was at Pelican Island as well?

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: So you helped clarify the title for the Fish and Wildlife Service and worked out this arrangement so there's about 5,000 acres or so that are protected under some kind of an agreement or lease.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: Right, for Pelican Island. Paul also was wondering if you could tell some stories about Tommy Wood. So in the first interview, you spent a fair amount of time talking about Jack Watson, so I clearly have a sense of him; he was the manager of the National Key Deer Refuge. Tommy Wood apparently was the first manager of the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

BILL: Tommy was another piece of work, character, entirely opposite from

Jack Watson. Jack was big, Tommy was rather slight, liked to smoke his cigarettes and drink his bourbon in the evening. And he got along well with the people, and he did a lot of work. He used to do red tide surveys, I think at NOAA, in addition to his refuge work. He helped in the acquisition program that we established. And I probably told you before Ding Darling, who had a winter place on Captiva, and became our first Refuge Director.

LIBBY: What do you mean about the first Refuge Director? The first Director...

BILL: Yeah, well he...

LIBBY: ...to come from Refuges?

BILL: He was, in effect, a political appointee in the New Deal era. We talked about Dr. Gabrielson.

LIBBY: Uh-huh.

BILL: Dr. Gabrielson was like the first professional Director of the Service.

LIBBY: Ok, right.

BILL: Ding Darling was a cartoonist.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: But they both had a binding love of the refuge system and they were both effective in their own ways. But Ding Darling, being a cartoonist, and what they did, that refuge, is that they set up an executive order without knowing what the implications of the Swamp and Overflow Acts and there were several Swamp and Overflow Acts, were and would be. So when I was put in charge

of the acquisition program for Ding Darling. Again I saw the state was going to take, just move in there irrespective of what the ownership was and say this is state land and in effect that's what they did where the school is located along Periwinkle Drive. So what to do, in fact the refuge supervisor in Region 4 just said, "Look, we can't do anything in terms of management, the ownership is so screwed up that we're going to have to get rid of this refuge." He was careful about that because it was very political, and the people on Sanibel were strong advocates for the refuge, but he couldn't do anything because we didn't know what lands were covered by the executive order, whether it was state or federal. And in many areas in Florida, you were familiar with that, the state just sold it and filled it, and that was it. So again, Rudy Rudolph and I teamed up, we were the Sanibel team. And Rudy wrote a biological report on the value of the area and that it should be preserved and managed and protected as a national wildlife refuge. I was aware of the law and what could be done from the land acquisition standpoint. And I went to the trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, they had a number of meetings. And in effect told them that we had a problem, they had a problem and we had a problem. If they tried to do anything we would probably oppose it and fight it, and so what could we do? And we worked out a deal, and it was largely my idea, that we would affect an exchange. We offered them some land to St. Mark's Refuge for a state park and Anclote Key up to the north. And we would get all of the state lands and water bottoms between the two township lines. One township line was just east of Tarpon Bay and the other one was on an entrance to Captiva

Island. And it was bounded by Periwinkle Drive, that's the Sanibel Captiva Road.

LIBBY: Right, been there.

BILL: And we worked out that exchange and that solved our problem; that solved the state's problem. Now the state thought they were getting the better of the deal and looking at it from a certain standpoint, they were. I mean they got developable lands on Anclote Key, but when we combined the state and federal land ownership on lands between the township lines, I don't care how you look at it; biologically, we came out a real winner. And if you wanted to make an appraisal, from a commercial standpoint, because we solved all the title problems up there, we didn't lose anything, I can tell you that.

LIBBY: So when you were at Ding Darling, did you ever go up in the lighthouse out there?

BILL: Yes, and when I was first working down there, that's when they had the ferry coming across.

LIBBY: Before the bridge?

BILL: Yeah, and I would stay and my family would stay, it was smaller then, it was in cabin that was next to the lighthouse.

LIBBY: Oh, so Dan stayed in that cabin?

BILL: I'm sure he did, yes.

LIBBY: Since he was your second son. Great! What was it like staying; what was that lighthouse like and was that the

only lighthouse you ever stayed in or near on a refuge?

BILL: Probably. I stayed near a number of lighthouses, but that was Service owned and it was a nice place to stay for a young family and it was cheap. [chuckling].

LIBBY: Well, what are other personal experiences or antidotes you want to share with us about refuges in particular?

BILL: Well, let me go back to Tommy Wood; Tommy Wood, he flew me quite a bit over the lands, one time we flew over the Keys, west of Key West. And we noted, this was refuge land, we noticed there was a person there.

LIBBY: In the Dry Tortugas?

BILL: Well.

LIBBY: There's not much west of Key West, except the Dry Tortugas are out there.

BILL: There's an arc of mangrove, island out there, and we noticed this one guy there and he was clearly in violation of refuge regulations. And he was naked, just living the life, and he was just enjoying himself out there. And so, Tommy gave him, they gave him the boot. But another time we were taking off, they kept the refuge plane in a wide ditch near the tract and so Tommy and I were going to fly to look at something. We got up about 50 feet off the ground and the engine had started to sputter, and then it stopped.

LIBBY: Was he the pilot or...?

BILL: He was the pilot.

LIBBY: Oh, he was the pilot, okay.

BILL: Oh yeah. And fortunately it was a float plane and fortunately Tarpon Bay was nearby and we landed with no problem. But Tommy came up and he said, "Oh damn it," he said, "I forgot the top off the gas."

LIBBY: [chuckling] So you ran out of gas?

BILL: No, it didn't run, there's water that condensed in the gas tank. And he was...

LIBBY: That's a good story, Bill, that's pretty funny. Did you ever have any, you spent a lot of time out in the woods and in the back lands, have any other close calls?

BILL: Well, besides from stepping on a cottonmouth.

LIBBY: Where was that? Do you remember where that was?

BILL: Yeah, that was at Piedmont.

LIBBY: At Piedmont. What happened when you stepped on the cottonmouth?

BILL: I moved.

LIBBY: Did you get bit?

BILL: No.

LIBBY: That's good.

BILL: And you expect things to happen if you're running over these lands all the time, and I was. I tell this story, don't let my wife see it but we...

LIBBY: I can't control that, you can control what she sees.

BILL: We had, we ran, funding for acquisition was up and down. And in the down years we would acquire lands by land exchanges or land for timber exchanges, so we had something going at Piedmont. And being a forester, I and the other guys, and we would mark timber for a timber and land exchange. And we were working on one and it was a Friday and we got up early and we worked all day and didn't leave until we finished and it was pretty dark. And I got home and I was pretty tired. My wife said she used to, it was enjoyable when I was working in the woods because I had an evergreen smell so to speak. But I got into bed and I wasn't going to take a shower or anything, just flopped into bed. And two days later, my wife said, "I don't know what these are, but I've got these red spots all over me."

LIBBY: Oh God!

BILL: So I infected my wife with chiggers.

LIBBY: Oh no! [laughing] Oh that's terrible! Did the chiggers not bother you, or you knew that you...?

BILL: Oh, I had the bites too.

LIBBY: You were tired when you got home.

BILL: Yeah, and there are certain things you expect.

LIBBY: Yeah, like getting poison ivy. Are you allergic to poison ivy?

BILL: I'm not allergic to it, but I used to get on my arms right here because they used the diameter tape around the tree to measure and then poison ivy kind of crawls up the trees.

LIBBY: How about poison oak or poison sumac?

BILL: You know I was, I was pretty careful where I walked; it was never a problem for me; mosquitoes and chiggers and I used to watch out for ticks.

LIBBY: Right.

BILL: I smoked a little back then and in the evening I would get home and light a cigarette and work them on the ticks that...

LIBBY: On your skin?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Wow, that would be dog ticks though, 'cause in those days we didn't really know about deer tick, right?

BILL: I don't know what ticks they had down there, but they had them.

LIBBY: Could you get diseases from them?

BILL: I imagine.

LIBBY: Okay, yeah.

BILL: We had a staff meeting in the regional office here, and somebody Don Perkuchin, he's on a New Jersey refuge, but he's real sick.

LIBBY: Oh, you told that story and how you guys diagnosed it just from talking about it and he had lyme disease.

BILL: Yeah he had lyme disease, the doctor's didn't know back then.

LIBBY: You told us that story, so that's pretty remarkable, that's maybe the first time you ever really heard of it, that you guys were able; I mean it was early.

BILL: Joe Dowhan was one of the first guys to have it up there.

LIBBY: I didn't know that.

BILL: Yeah, he was working in Connecticut in the marshes, and he was diagnosed at the Yale New Haven Hospital; that's the hospital I was born in by the way. And it was, not rare but people didn't know that they had it. He was one of the first people that they; so he said every so often every year or so he's go back to the hospital in New Haven and let them...

LIBBY: He'd be an interesting person to do an oral history on, Joe Dowhan. Well he's still around, he lives in Massachusetts.

BILL: Does he?

LIBBY: Yeah.

BILL: Where about?

LIBBY: He's out in the Pioneer Valley, Deerfield, I think he's in Deerfield.

BILL: I recruited Joe.

LIBBY: You did?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Who else did you recruit that you're really proud of?

BILL: Well, I don't know. I got Bob Miller from...

LIBBY: Bob Miller.

BILL:Region 1.

LIBBY: You bought him over, alright. He was our Chief of Realty for quite some time.

BILL: And there were quite a few.

LIBBY: Well, why don't you tell us some Dan stories, Dan on refuges maybe as a kid.

BILL: Well...

LIBBY: I have an image, I know he's talked about Blackbeard Island, he talks about that sometimes.

BILL: Does he?

LIBBY: Yeah.

BILL: Oh, we used to take, I used to take them and I had a neighbor in Atlanta. We'd bring a couple of my kids, Dan, and a couple of this neighbor's kids and go down on Black Beard. And of course took him to Piedmont.

LIBBY: So would you offer all your kids an opportunity to go, or were there some that were much more interested in going on these trips than others?

BILL: Well, if you can from that picture, they were, took them to Key West and the Key Deer area, took them to Black Beard, took them to Piedmont, Okefenokee.

LIBBY: Yeah, those are really formative years for them to be out on these refuges or lands that would become refuges.

BILL: But you might ask Dan about some of the experiences he had. You say, see that picture. Jack Watson was rehabilitating this eagle, and he had him tethered, out on Big Pine Key. And I said, "Jack, can, my kids want to get a closer look at the eagle that you're rehabbing." He said, "Well, that's alright." He said, "But don't get too close and make too quick a move or else you get him excited." Well as I said here, they did get too close and they did make a move that was too fast and the eagle flared. And I said, I understand a 50 meter speed record for four barefoot boys on Overshell Road still...[laughing].

LIBBY: Still stands, huh.

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: That record hasn't been broken yet?

BILL: I don't know, but they moved pretty fast.

LIBBY: I bet they did. Yeah, it's a powerful thing when a bald eagle.

BILL: Well, Jack said, I came down there again, I said, "Jack, what happened to that eagle. Did you release it?" He said, "Yeah, I released him," he said,

“but that God d*amn thing,” he said, “I threw him up in the air,” he said, “and he came down and he got me.” He said, “One of his talons got me in this part of the hand.” He said, “Like this...” Jack swore like a real trooper. He said, “I couldn’t get rid of him.”

LIBBY: I would have liked to have met Jack Watson; he was a real character.

BILL: He would fascinate the kids. Jack, he had some real experiences but he would elaborate some of them too. And he said, he was telling the boys a story, he said, “I was out there around Okeechobee.” And he said, “These guys were, just shot some birds illegally.” So he said, “I went crawling up to them,” he said, “and all a sudden [makes a noise] I got hit in the leg.” And he said, “It was a snake, I got a snake bite.” And he said, “I got my knife out,” and he said, “and I cut it.” “And then what did you do, Mr. Watson?” He said, “I arrested the sons of bitches.”

[laughing]

LIBBY: Well, next time I see dad, I’m going to ask him about Jack Watson. Why don’t we; is there anything else about your, that you’d like to share? Anything else you’re thinking about from your Fish and Wildlife Service career because if not, let’s just take a few minutes to talk about some of the accomplishments that you had after you retired from the Service. So you still did a lot of good work for the Fish and Wildlife Service in your other capacities.

BILL: Well, with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

LIBBY: Were you; how old were you when you retired?

BILL: I was 62.

LIBBY: Okay, 62, so full of vim and vigor.

BILL: Yeah, the Foundation approached me; I announced I was going to retire about three months before. And they heard about it, they approached me and they wanted me to work with them. At that time the big thing was the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, so I took on that responsibility. I was in charge of that program; that was their big program. And working with the states and working with private organizations, working in Canada, United States and Mexico, and that occupied my time for a couple, for a few years. Then the program changed, I was in charge of their wetland protection activities and it was; I think we did good work, but there was nothing outstanding there that I think.

LIBBY: And your office was right here in this building.

BILL: That’s right.

LIBBY: And was Ed Moses the refuge manager here at the time?

BILL: Ed was a, you know it’s funny because I came and I said, “Ed, do you have any room; I’m looking for an office.” And I said, “I just hired a staff person.” That was Lucy Wallace. And he said, “No, Bill, I don’t have anything.” But he must have thought about it, after a while, you know maybe this could be a good thing for...

LIBBY: I bet it could be a real good thing for the refuge to have somebody from the...

BILL: So he called me up a couple days later, he said, "I do have a place." I said, "Okay, we'll have to fix..." I provided some funds for him too.

LIBBY: Yeah, you had the nicest doors in the entire office.

BILL: Oh, is that right?

LIBBY: Yeah, you still do up there. And then when you retired, I actually had your desk, I sat at your desk for quite some time; it's still upstairs. But when we couldn't make the building handicapped accessible, I needed to move down here so that I could greet the public and talk to anybody who might come in. Otherwise I would still be sitting at your old desk.

BILL: How about that.

LIBBY: Yeah, how about that.

BILL: And I worked around the country with some real good people. And this is a Dan Story. I used to attend the, a lot of affairs of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies or Ducks Unlimited or Nature Conservancy or what have you. And at one meeting, I was in a group and the group included John Gottschalk and Jack Berryman.

LIBBY: Jack Berryman, right, okay.

BILL: Did you know Jack?

LIBBY: No, but I recognize his name.

BILL: Well, Jack was head of the Predator and Rodent Control activity when they were in the Service.

LIBBY: He still runs, he has a publication that comes out that's called *Animal, Human Wildlife Interactions* or something, so he's still doing that.

BILL: Is that right? Well anyway, Jack and I were real good friends and John and I were close too. And Dan was working in the committee, Merchant Marine Fisheries Committee. And they came up to me and Jack Berryman said, "Yeah, we've been meeting with your son, Bill, we used to say 'that's Bill Ashe's son'." And he said, "Now we say, 'Bill Ashe is his father'." [laughing] So I said, "Jack, you know, sometimes we do things right, not often, but sometimes."

LIBBY: Yeah, that's right. So how many years did you work for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation?

BILL: I think twelve.

LIBBY: Twelve years. And while you were working for the Foundation, is that when you got involved with the National Wildlife Refuge Association or did that happen after you retired the second time?

BILL: The Refuge Association came about a little bit after I retired.

LIBBY: Okay. After you retired from...

BILL: The Service.

LIBBY: The Fish and Wildlife Service, alright.

BILL: And my association with the Refuge Association had some benefits. The volunteer program; when I was there, and a couple years after I started with them I became Chairman of the Refuge Association. And I said, "What can we do to be an effective organization?" And we looked at the volunteers program, and I said, "Okay, there's about 50 or 60 volunteer programs and we could look at that and try to," and I had kind of a motto, "We want a hundred by hundred."

LIBBY: I remember that.

BILL: The hundred volunteer programs on the 100th anniversary. And when the 100th anniversary came we were over 200. Now we had meetings in Virginia Beach and we had other things, training programs we set up. And it was kind of fortunate because I said, "You know I work for the Foundation, I could get them involved and provide some funding. Well, my son is Chief of the refuge thing; we could get the Service involved." And we did, we set up training programs and improved the activities of the volunteer programs.

LIBBY: And when you say volunteer program, are you talking about the Friends?

BILL: The Friends groups.

LIBBY: Friends groups, right. You were there at the perfect time to bring the three entities together.

BILL: And I had some good help. There was a woman at Parker River.

LIBBY: Oh, I know who.

BILL: She was a dynamo and she had good ideas.

LIBBY: Remember her name?

BILL: No, I can't; I can dig it out.

LIBBY: I have a book over in, yeah.

BILL: I got her and who is it, Molly Brown.

LIBBY: Molly Brown at Friends of Back Bay.

BILL: And they provided the energy and the ideas, and we developed a booklet, a handbook for Friends groups.

LIBBY: Was that the Taking Flight?

BILL: Yeah. I gave the forward to it.

LIBBY: Oh, alright, nice. I have it; I could go get it.

BILL: And so it worked out well. I had a background with the Service, my son was in charge of Refuges; the Foundation provided grants and could provide funding and it took off.

LIBBY: Yes, it did take off and it has had tremendous benefits to the refuge system; tremendous.

BILL: Well, then read that booklet.

LIBBY: Do you want me to go get it?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Alright, I'll be right back.
[casual talk, I thought maybe I could

pause this, but I can't figure it out. I'll be right back.]

LIBBY: Alright, here you are Bill. "A message from Bill Ashe."

Bill: Let's right, see.

LIBBY: "President of the National Wildlife Association." And you explain that "In 1994, the Board of Directors of the National Wildlife Refuge Association made an important decision. They agreed that citizen support groups, ("Friends") were critical to the protection and perpetuation of the National Wildlife Refuge System. For this reason, the Board added Friends group development and training to their strategic plan." And this book, you are the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, along with Bob Herbst and Larry Smith, Cyrus Lyle; some of these people were former refuge managers, John Turner was an At Large Member, he used to be the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Beverly Heinze-Lacey, that's it, Beverly, she's the one who actually; she wrote this book and she was...

BILL: She and another woman up there.

LIBBY: Ed Moses was the regional representative. So Harold Benson, Phil Morgan; Phil Morgan was a refuge manager wasn't he?

BILL: Yes, he was.

LIBBY: What refuges did he manage?

BILL: I don't know.

LIBBY: He was in the south. Harold Benson.

BILL: Harold died. Harold was a great guy, he did a lot of good work.

LIBBY: Bob Fields, I didn't know him; I don't know him. Karen Hollingsworth was a board member at the time. Ed Crozier, still involved out in Minnesota. So a lot of the same people, a lot of the people that were around back in this; I mean this book was published, which was 1997, are still involved. So that's a really important part of your legacy.

BILL: Well, we set a goal and we did fairly well at accomplishing it. There was one other thing that was kind of with this; oh, when I was on the Board there, I started the Employee of the Year Award, the Refuge Manager of the Year Award, the Volunteer of the Year Award.

LIBBY: And the Friend's Group of the Year Award.

BILL: That's right; those were my ideas. I was able, you know it was the right time and I had the right contacts.

LIBBY: Right. It's still important; everyone wants to be Refuge Manager of the Year.

BILL: Is that right?

LIBBY: Or Refuge Employee of the Year. It's a very good, it's hard competition, you know, it's very difficult to get selected.

BILL: Well, you know the first one, the first Refuge Manager of the Year Award was from California; he was a regional

director out there later on, of California. Anyway, he was selected and I personally took an involvement in the selection in the first four or five years. And one of the groups that I had participate was the Audubon Society, 'cause they hired the first refuge manager. And they wanted to kind of take over and I said, "No, this is an idea of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. We want you as a partner, but you're not taking over." And I think, as I told people at the time, I tried to get this award created when I was with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

LIBBY: Yeah, you told us about that.

BILL: Did I?

LIBBY: Yes, and you said that there was a surprising amount of resistance in Washington, because then people would say, "Well, we need to have an Ecological Services Employee of the Year, and Fisheries." So you were able to do this when you retired.

BILL: That's right. It was a great idea, but nothing happened.

LIBBY: Sometimes you have to get outside government to make things happen. So tell us what you're doing these days?

BILL: I'm kind of relaxing, or trying to.

LIBBY: Trying to relax. You have grandkids and they keep you busy.

BILL: Oh yeah, well when you call one of them...

LIBBY: One of them answered the phone.

BILL: ...my receptionist.

LIBBY: Do you tell them stories about refuges a lot, do they appreciate what you've done for conservation in this country,- do you think?

BILL: Well, they know I worked at it, that's rather [unintelligible@1:34:35].

LIBBY: Even after you retired though, you did an awful lot and then you helped locally in Harvard, with the lands in Harvard and with Oxbow, you know that I really appreciate all the work that you've done. It's a passion and you keep going; it's good we're on a committee together and I think we may get some protection on the mass development property, the environmental business zone.

BILL: Is that right?

LIBBY: Yeah, that's, there's some protection happening there now, which I can tell you about later. So the fight continues, the struggle continues.

BILL: Well, you know my involvement in local politics, and I think other people ought to think about it, is that I don't have to fight all the time. They know that you would not go along with this kind of development, and they don't want to take you on because you do have influence and still a little vigor. And you know I have more knowledge on certain things than they do.

LIBBY: You better stick around for a lot longer then, we need you. I like to kind of close with maybe you giving some words of wisdom or anything like, anything you'd like to share as we end

this, what's turning out to be four and a half hours of history with you.

BILL: Well you know, I ran across the Robert Frost poem, "The Road [Not] Taken." And a long time ago when I was starting out I took the road that was least traveled. But it was a good road for me, I really enjoyed working for the Service; I especially enjoy the people who are in the Service. We all like to be comfortable, but a great number of people that the Service enjoys are not out for the book, they're out for the enjoyment of it and the satisfaction of doing things that they feel are important to do. And let me tell you, after you retire, that's important; self-satisfaction is an important factor in life, particularly when you get older. I have the satisfaction of that, I have the satisfaction of five sons, who all turned out well; they're a pain sometimes, but who isn't. [chuckling]

LIBBY: That's right.

BILL: And you know it's especially satisfying to see Dan make it to the top. And I try not to get in his way too much, and he does call for my view occasionally.

LIBBY: That's great, that's good. He's lucky to have you.

BILL: Well, as I said, I think it's important to teach by example. And to play by, you know I was not an easy guy to work for or to fight against and I take pride in that. At the same time, you have to be careful to treat everybody, and everyone fairly; you do that and you're not going to have any real problems in life.

LIBBY: Right, right.

BILL: I fought the Corps, and my batting average is not bad. I fought the people in the Department, and I fought Directors, who I didn't think were doing their job. And as I told you before, you know, later in life it wasn't good for my advancement but I don't miss that a bit. Talking to people like you and then working with people like you, that's it. I tell, I told; they had a party for Dan in Washington five or six months ago in the Secretary's office. And they said, "Do you want to say a few words, Bill?" And I was hesitant about saying to people, the Secretary had talked and I said, "Well, let me say one thing," I said, "you know when, early in my career," I said, "they had a meeting in the region," this was in Atlanta. And I said, "The Assistant Secretary came down and he was praising the regional director for things that had been done." And I said, "One of my associates next to me, said Bill, you did that. You did that!" I said, "Look," I said, "One of my jobs, as I read it, is to help the regional director do things." I said, "And whenever I needed help, he was there for. Yeah, I guess you might say I did it." And I said, "Going through life, I got quite a few awards. And I'd be standing up there when they were saying nice things, and I'd be wondering how many are saying, hey Paul, hey George you did that." So you know the little message I was sending there to my son and others, you don't do things by yourself. And you need a lot of help if you're going to work and recognize that.

LIBBY: Yeah. Great, well thanks, Bill.

BILL: Okay.

LIBBY: It's been an honor being able to spend this time with you.

BILL: Well, my pleasure.

LIBBY: And I look forward to, of course, seeing you many more times in the future.

BILL: Well, I'm glad you got me now, next year I don't know.

LIBBY: Glad I got you while you still have your memories and you're still able to get around.

BILL: You know, I used to take pride in my memory, a name, a phone number, what have you. Somebody would say in a meeting, "Well, George, what's his phone number?" And I'd say, come up with it. And they'd say, "You remember his phone number?" I'd say, "Yeah." That doesn't happen anymore.

LIBBY: I think you just remembered the important things. You remember your friends, people you love, the highlights of your life; it's been a good one. So thanks, Bill.